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The Truth Speaks

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Just days away from hitting all 'top priority' Iran targets: Israel

Israel plans 'multi-front war' while US sends more ground troops; Iran warns of setting US troops on fire; Iran speaker accuses US of plotting ground attack even as it claims of making diplomatic efforts.

DUBAI/ JERUSALEM

As the conflict in the Middle East enters its second month, all the major parties involved are doubling down on their positions, seemingly weighing the option of further escalation.

Israel stated that it was prepared for a "multi-front war," Iran's parliament speaker said the country's forces were "waiting" for a US ground invasion, while more US troops arrived in the region.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) said it is ready for a "multi-front" war in the wake of the Houthis firing two missiles towards southern Israel. Both were intercepted. "We've been fighting for the last two and a half years a multi-front war," said an IDF spokesperson.

'We will soon finish the job'

The Israeli military is just days away from striking all the targets in Iran it considers to be "top priority," an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesperson said on Sunday.

IDF's international spokesperson Nadav Shoshani said the military classifies its targets into different groups. "It could be ballistic missiles, (weapons) production, nuclear command and control centres, and so on," said Shoshani.

Within each group, there are different categories: "essential, important, and additional," Shoshani explained.

In a few days, "we will be able to finish the job against the top priority targets in the family group of production," he said. "(That) doesn't mean we're exhausting our targets … but talking about the top priority of what we marked as top priority, we will be able to achieve that within a few days."

'Israel hits key ballistic missile unit in Iran'

The Israeli military said that overnight it had attacked a key production facility in Tehran used by Iran's defence ministry to manufacture components for ballistic missiles.

"The site is one of only two of its kind in Iran where critical components were developed for the assembly and operationalisation of missiles set to launch toward the state of Israel," the military said.

The strikes also targeted facilities linked to ballistic missile engines, drone manufacturing, air defence systems and missile storage. Since the US-Israel war on Iran began on February 28, Israel has attacked several weapons production facilities in the Islamic republic, as well as nuclear sites.

'Will target USS Abraham Lincoln if it enters range'

TEHRAN

Iran's Navy Commander, Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, has warned that the US aircraft carrier strike group could be targeted, following the sinking of the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, as reported by Tehran Times.

"Once the Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group enters its range, it will be targeted with coastal missiles to avenge the Dena martyrs. All movements and positions of the strike group, as well as its requests to regional countries, are being monitored in real time.

The eastern Strait of Hormuz and the Sea of Oman, the gateway to the Strait and the Persian Gulf. are fully under Iranian naval control."

The Iranian frigate, IRIS Dena, was returning home after participating in the Milan multilateral naval exercise hosted by India when it was sunk. At least 87 Iranian sailors were killed in the attack, marking a major escalation in the conflict between the US and Iran outside of the Persian Gulf.

SHORTS FROM WAR FRONT

- Houthi missile strike widens war, threatens further shipping disruption.
- Two loud explosions heard in northern Tehran
- Iran Guards threaten to hit US universities in Mideast.
- Israeli military says another soldier killed in south Lebanon.
- Iran to target USS Abraham Lincoln carrier if it moves within range.
- Iranian ambassador won't leave Lebanon despite expulsion order, according to diplomatic source.
- Ten Kuwaiti troops injured in Iranian missile attack on army camp, Kuwait says.

'US plots ground attack despite diplomatic efforts'

TEHRAN

Iran's parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said on Sunday that the United States was plotting a ground attack despite publicly engaging in diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the war.

"The enemy publicly sends messages of negotiation and dialogue while secretly planning a ground attack," Ghalibaf said in a statement. "Our men are waiting for the arrival of the American soldiers on the ground to set them on fire."

'Will lead Iran's democracy after regime falls'

DALLAS

- Reza Pahlavi urges US to intensify military pressure on Tehran
- He vows to lead Iran's democracy after regime falls
- Pahlavi sees Iran as partner, not security threat

Reza Pahlavi, the exiled son of Iran's last monarch, has called on the United States to intensify its military campaign against Tehran, positioning himself as a potential leader for a post-regime transition, as per agencies.

Speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference near Dallas, Pahlavi framed his appeal in stark terms, asking whether Iran could move from anti-US rhetoric to alignment with Washington, a remark that drew repeated applause.

'Ready to lead transition' as oppn pitch sharpens

Pahlavi told supporters he is prepared to lead a democratic transition in Iran, signaling a more assertive political stance amid escalating tensions between Tehran and Washington.

"President Trump is making America great again. I intend to make Iran great again," he said, as per reports.

He outlined a vision of a transformed Iran that abandons nuclear ambitions, regional militancy, and threats to global shipping routes, including the Strait of Hormuz.

Pahlavi presented a blueprint for a radically different Iran, one that exports "engineers instead of extremists" and integrates into the global economy.

He described a future US-Iran partnership that could generate more than $1 trillion for the American economy over the next decade.

The proposal positions Iran as what he called one of the largest untapped economic opportunities globally, backed by a population of over 90 million with a young and educated workforce.

Iran's economic stress deepens pressure for change

The pitch comes at a time when Iran's economy is under sustained strain from sanctions and internal challenges.

Pahlavi also floated the idea of expanding the Abraham Accords framework into what he termed the 'Cyrus Accords,' a future scenario where Iran normalises ties with Israel and integrates into a broader regional diplomatic architecture.

Betting gang busted in Karkala, 5 arrested

UDUPI

Five persons were arrested in Karnataka's Udupi district after they allegedly tried to run over police officers with a car in two separate incidents while being probed for their involvement in an illegal cricket betting racket, police said on Sunday.

The incidents occurred on March 27 in Karkala and Shirva. In the first case, a police team in Karkala signalled a black Toyota Fortuner to stop near Hanchikatte. The occupants allegedly drove the vehicle towards the officers in an attempt to harm them before fleeing.The same SUV was later intercepted in Shirva, where the suspects allegedly pushed a police officer and tried to escape. The five were eventually detained. The are Sudarshan Shetty (29), Kartavya Shetty (27), Arun Shetty (29), Tejas (28) and Prajwal Shetty (29), all residents of Kundapur, Byndoor and Hebri taluks of Udupi.

Police said the group is suspected of luring people with promises of high returns by collecting money for cricket betting and allegedly cheating them. They are also believed to be part of organised illegal gambling activities linked to ongoing cricket matches.

Cases have been registered under relevant sections for attempt to murder, obstruction of public servants and provisions of the gambling law. The accused were produced before a magistrate.

QUICK READ

Congress unveils '5 guarantees' for Assam

NAOBOICHA: : Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday announced his party's "five guarantees" for poll-bound Assam, with a focus on women's welfare, healthcare for all, land rights and justice in the Zubeen Garg death case. He also took a swipe at the BJP-led government in the state, accusing it of indulging in rampant corruption and working "to fill the coffers" of its leaders and their families while addressing a rally at Naoboicha in Lakhimpur.

3 CAPF men suspended for playing carrom

KOLKATA: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has suspended three jawans on charges of allegedly playing carrom inside a local office of the ruling Trinamool Congress in Suri of Birbhum district, West Bengal, in violation of the Model Code of Conduct. The action was taken on Sunday, barely three days after the ECI took similar action against seven other jawans posted in Murshidabad district on March 26. The ECi acted after a video of the incident went viral online.

Kerala trapped between LDF-UDF loots: PM

PALAKKAD

In a high-voltage rally here on Sunday ahead of the 9 April polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tore into both the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-led UDF, accusing them of "looting" Kerala and declaring that the BJP-led NDA is the state's "real A-team", not anyone's "B-team".

Instilling confidence among BJP workers, who have faced an electoral drought ever since the formation of the saffron party four decades ago, Modi asserted that the NDA would form the next government in Kerala.

"In Kerala, Team BJP and Team NDA are to form the government. With the blessings of the people of Kerala, and with all your support, we will form the government here, and we will leave no stone unturned in serving Kerala," he said.

'Could sense a changing political atmosphere'

Promising to fulfil Modi's guarantee in Kerala if voted to power, the PM said he could sense a changing political atmosphere in the state, indicating growing support for the BJP-led alliance.

Positioning the BJP-led NDA as a decisive alternative, the PM said an NDA government would advance the vision of a 'Viksit Kerala'.

"There is a different atmosphere in Kerala, sending a message of change," he said.

Modi claimed that the NDA and the BJP are witnessing increasing acceptance among various sections of society.

"Now, the youth of Kerala have faith in the BJP and the NDA. Now, the women of Kerala have affection for the BJP and the NDA. Now, the farmers of Kerala have love for the BJP and the NDA," he said.

Launching a scathing attack on both fronts, he alleged that the LDF and the UDF have alternated in power while "looting" the state.

"There has been a practical understanding between them -- for a few years the LDF runs the government and fills its pockets, and after that the UDF comes and continues the loot. In this arrangement, Kerala has remained trapped," he said.

He said both the Left and the Congress accuse each other of being the BJP's "B-team".

"This means that both the LDF and the UDF have themselves admitted that in this Kerala election, if there is one real A-team, it is only and only the BJP," he said.

Modi said both fronts are targeting the BJP out of fear.

"This means that if these two corrupt parties are afraid of anyone, it is the BJP. They fear the BJP because they believe that if the BJP comes to power, all their wrongdoings will be exposed," he said.

He alleged that successive LDF and UDF governments have been involved in major scams and failed to act against each other.

'Will probe every scam of LDF, UDF if BJP forms govt'

"If a BJP government comes to power, it will investigate every scam of the LDF and the UDF and ensure justice for the people of Kerala," he said.

Modi also claimed that the Congress and the Left are allies in several states across the country but present themselves as rivals in Kerala.

"Look at Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Assam and Tamil Nadu--the Congress and the Communists are together. But here in Kerala, they abuse each other. People must remain cautious of both," he said.

'Uphold justice without compromise'

MYSURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday called upon newly inducted police sub-inspectors to uphold justice without compromise and work towards building a drug-free and equitable society. He said this while addressing the passing-out parade of the 46th batch of Civil Police Sub-Inspector trainees at the parade ground in Mysuru.

The chief minister set targets on maintaining law and order, tackling emerging crimes, and protecting vulnerable sections with integrity and courage.

Siddaramaiah underlined the responsibility that comes with the uniform and adding that discipline, restraint, courage, integrity and humanity must define policing.

RAINING SOAPS!

DMK manifesto lists ₹2K for women, Rs 8K for household items

CHENNAI

Going populist yet again, Tamil Nadu's ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) on Sunday promised coupons worth Rs 8,000 to families that don't pay Income Tax to buy household appliances like fridge and washing machine and extending the CM's Free Breakfast Scheme in government schools to cover students from sixth to eight standards.

"DMK manifesto will be the Superstar of this election that will witness Dravidian Model 2.0 government," Chief Minister and DMK President M K Stalin said, after unveiling the manifesto which also promised that the monthly assistance to 1.31 crore women will be increased from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000.

Other Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) promises by the DMK are increasing the Old Age Pension from Rs 1,200 to Rs 2,000 and enhancing the cash assistance for government school students who pursue higher education from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500.

Apart from these promises that could further drain the exchequer and increase the state's overall debt which currently stands at Rs 10 lakh crore, the manifesto also focused on infrastructure development across the state, region-specific development across the state, region-specific development projects, upgrading government colleges, and enhancing health care system.

It also promised several measures to boost the economy like striving to bring investments worth Rs 18 lakh crore with 50 lakh jobs in five years, skill training for five lakh youth who have completed higher education and and a stipend of Rs 1,500 per month upon enrolment and completion of a 6-month training. It also said 35 lakh higher education students will be provided with laptops over five years.

Some of the key announcements were extending the breakfast scheme to students from sixth to eight standards benefitting an additional 15 lakh students in state and Rs 8,000 for women from non-IT paying families to choose and buy new or replace household items they need for their family.

QUICK READ

Massive drive clears black spots across Bengaluru

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
In a major civic initiative, the Bengaluru Central City Corporation conducted a special cleanliness drive on March 28 across several congested areas, targeting long-standing garbage accumulation and unhygienic dumping zones. The large-scale operation focused on clearing waste that had piled up along footpaths, drains, and roadside margins, turning many locations into chronic dumping spots. Leading the initiative, Commissioner Rajendra Cholan emphasized the importance of sustained and coordinated efforts to tackle the issue. The sheer volume of waste collected highlights the urgent need for continuous drives.

Lack of cleanliness plague KBS foot over bridge

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
The bridge, which connects key transit points. including the Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna Railway Station, had recently drawn attention for being misused as a hangout spot by sex workers and members of the transgender community. Following complaints, authorities including the Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation and local police stepped in to curb such activities and restore order. However, the structure is now making headlines for a different set of concerns. Commuters have reported unhygienic conditions on the bridge, with red spit stains scattered across the walkway, creating an unpleasant environment.

Plastic ban enforced around Muzrai temples in Bengaluru rural

CH NEWS, BENGALURU
The order targets commonly used plastic materials such as thermocol, plastic microbeads, single-use plastic bottles, covers, cups, spoons, and flex materials. The initiative is aimed at safeguarding the natural environment surrounding temple premises, including flora, fauna, and micro-organisms that are often adversely affected by plastic waste. Although the state government had already imposed restrictions on the manufacture and supply of certain plastic products, there was previously no specific enforcement within temple areas. As a result, devotees frequently carried pooja materials in plastic bags, leading to the accumulation of waste in and around temple premises.

Bagmane secures naming rights for Namma Metro station

In a significant move to boost non-fare revenue, BMRCL has entered into an agreement with BDPL to name a metro station along the ORR corridor in city

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

In a significant move to boost non-fare revenue, BMRCL has entered into an agreement with Bagmane Developers Private Limited (BDPL) to name a metro station along the Outer Ring Road (ORR) corridor in Bengaluru.

As per officials, the agreement allows Bagmane Developers to acquire naming rights for a metro station located on the Silk Board to KR Puram stretch of the Namma Metro network.

The station, currently known as the DRDO Sports Complex station, will be rebranded under the Bagmane as part of the deal. The agreement was formally signed between BMRCL Managing Director Dr. J. Ravishankar and Bagmane Developers' representative Aditya Bagmane. The deal, valued at ₹40 crore for a period of 20 years, marks another step in the metro authority's efforts to monetize its infrastructure.

As part of the financial arrangement, Bagmane Developers has already paid ₹20 crore upfront, accounting for half of the total contract value.

The remaining amount will be paid as per the agreed schedule over the 20-year period. Officials noted that such initiatives are essential for generating additional revenue streams beyond ticket collections, helping fund maintenance and future expansion of the metro network.

The Silk Board to KR Puram corridor, spanning approximately 19.75 kilometers, is a crucial link in Bengaluru's metro expansion plan.

This stretch is expected to significantly ease traffic congestion along the busy Outer Ring Road and improve connectivity to major commercial hubs and residential areas. The line also plays an important role in linking the city's eastern and southeastern regions, eventually contributing to better access to the airport corridor.

Authorities have indicated that the corridor is likely to be opened for commercial operations by December, subject to final inspections and clearances.

Once operational, the newly named station is expected to serve thousands of daily commuters, particularly professionals working in nearby technology parks and business districts.

K'taka govt revises LPG distribution amid supply shortage

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Amid concerns over a shortage of cooking gas across the state, Minister KH Muniyappa has reassured the public that steps have been taken to ensure uninterrupted supply for domestic consumers.

Addressing the issue, the minister clarified that the revised distribution policy aims to prevent inconvenience to households in both rural and urban areas.

As per the new guidelines, domestic LPG cylinders will be supplied once every 45 days in rural areas, while urban households will receive one cylinder every 25 days. The move is intended to streamline supply and ensure equitable distribution during the ongoing shortage.

The government has also introduced changes in the distribution system to manage the situation effectively.

The minister acknowledged that the shortage has also impacted commercial establishments, particularly hotels and restaurants. Many eateries have reportedly been forced to shut operations due to limited availability of LPG. Currently, hotels are receiving only about 20 percent of their required cooking gas supply, leading to operational challenges across the hospitality sector.

To address this concern, the government has scheduled a crucial on March 31, 2026, to discuss the possibility of increasing LPG allocation for commercial users. The meeting is expected to play a key role in determining how additional supply can be diverted to hotels without affecting domestic consumers.

Meanwhile, essential services such as hospitals are being given top priority, with authorities ensuring 100 percent LPG supply to healthcare institutions. This measure is aimed at preventing any disruption in critical medical services.

The minister also revealed that discussions have already been held with Union Petroleum Minister and Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the supply situation. A final decision on increasing allocations, particularly for commercial users, is expected following the upcoming meeting.

Appealing to the public, the minister urged citizens not to believe rumors regarding fuel shortages or price hikes. He assured that the government is closely monitoring the situation, including concerns about fuel prices at petrol pumps and the availability of commercial cylinders, and expressed confidence that normalcy will be restored soon.

Govt committed to women empowerment: Minister

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Reaffirming the state government's commitment to women empowerment, Karnataka Women and Child Development Minister Lakshmi Hebbalkar stated that initiatives like the Gruha Lakshmi and Shakti schemes are aimed at ensuring dignity and self-reliance for women.

The minister was addressing a gathering at Basaveshwara Bhavan in Laggere during a program organized on the occasion of Congress leader Laggere Narayanaswamy's birthday. The event featured a mass baby shower ceremony for 208 women, along with free health check-ups, a blood donation drive, and a surgical camp.

Highlighting the progress made by women in society, Hebbalkar said that women today are capable of making independent decisions and leading lives with self-respect. She emphasized that the government's welfare programs are designed to strengthen women socially and economically.

Speaking about maternal and child welfare, the minister noted that the government takes responsibility for the well-being of both mother and child from pregnancy until the child reaches six years of age. She added that nutritional support is being provided to pregnant women and children to ensure healthy development.

Hebbalkar also praised Narayanaswamy for his contributions to society, stating that his efforts to support the poor and needy through such initiatives are commendable. She said his work serves as an inspiration and is driven by genuine social concern rather than political motives. The minister extended her wishes to his family for continuing such meaningful service.

She further shared that she has been organizing similar mass baby shower ceremonies every year in her Belagavi Rural constituency for the past seven years, reinforcing her commitment to maternal welfare.

Several dignitaries and public figures attended the event, including religious leader Jagadguru Madivala Machideva Swamiji, Congress leader Kusuma Hanumantharayappa, and actress and former Bigg Boss contestant Ashwini Gowda, along with other prominent personalities. The program reflected a blend of social service and community participation aimed at uplifting women and families.

Counterfeit cigarette racket busted

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

The Bengaluru International Airport police busted a criminal enterprise of counterfeit cigarettes, faking various brands, that were imported from Cambodia. Five accused, including a father-son duo, were arrested. The police said the counterfeit contraband worth about Rs 50 lakh, imported by the accused, were seized at the parking area of Terminal 2 of Kempegowda International Airport on Saturday. Abdul Bashid, a resident of HRBR Layout, his son Mohammed Ashiq, Mohammed Anwar Ibrahim, Mohammed Atar Ansari, and Ghulam Hussain, all residents of Chennai, were arrested. A case was registered after N Rajesh, a field executive of Anvesh IPR Services Company -- a cigarette supply agency of ITC, complained about a network of defrauding people by importing fake cigarettes.

'Domestic harassment': Man seeks police protection

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

According to the complaint, the couple had been married for several years, and their relationship was initially stable. However, over time, tensions reportedly escalated due to the wife's behavior, which the husband described as excessively suspicious and confrontational.

He alleged that frequent arguments over minor issues gradually turned their household environment stressful and emotionally draining.

In his complaint, the husband has made several serious allegations against his wife. He claimed that he was subjected to continuous mental harassment, with his actions constantly being questioned and doubted. He further stated that she would often behave in a manner that undermined his dignity in front of others, including friends and relatives.

The complaint also mentions instances of alleged verbal abuse, where trivial disagreements would lead to shouting and accusations directed not only at him but also at his family members. Additionally, the husband has expressed concerns over his safety, alleging that arguments sometimes escalated to the point where his wife attempted to physically assault him, leaving him in fear for his well-being.

Unable to cope with the situation, the man eventually decided to seek legal intervention. He approached the Amruthahalli Police Station and submitted a written complaint requesting protection and relief from the alleged harassment.

Police officials have confirmed that the complaint has been received and that both parties will be called in for counseling as part of the initial course of action. Authorities stated that efforts will be made to mediate the dispute and understand the perspectives of both individuals before proceeding further.

The case underscores a broader trend where domestic conflicts are becoming increasingly complex, with authorities emphasizing the need for balanced intervention and support mechanisms for all individuals involved, regardless of gender.

2 killed in car-bike collision in Bengaluru

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

In a tragic road accident in Bengaluru, two individuals riding a motorcycle were killed on the spot after being hit by a car near Vasanthnagar late at night. The incident has once again raised concerns over reckless driving and traffic violations in the city.

According to police reports, the accident occurred near the Waqf Board office in the Vasanthnagar area when a car allegedly entered a one-way road in the wrong direction and collided head-on with a motorcycle. The impact of the crash was severe, leaving both riders dead at the scene.

The deceased have been identified as Zubair Ahmed (42) and Abdul Muneer Pasha (16). Authorities stated that the force of the collision caused fatal injuries to both victims, leaving no chance for immediate medical intervention. Preliminary investigations suggest that the car driver, identified as Ayyappa, was under the influence of alcohol.

Devotees fall ill after consuming Ram Navami prasada in Bettanahalli

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

Several devotees reportedly fell ill after consuming prasad during Ram Navami celebrations at a temple in Bettanahalli near Bengaluru. Health officials rushed to the spot as cases of vomiting and diarrhea were reported soon after the meal was served.

The incident occurred in Bettanahalli village of Devanahalli taluk in Bengaluru Rural district, where a large number of devotees had gathered at a local temple to mark the auspicious occasion of Ram Navami.

As part of the celebrations, free food, or prasad, was distributed to attendees, a practice that is observed annually at the temple.

However, shortly after consuming the prasad, many devotees began experiencing symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhea, triggering panic among those present. Local authorities and health officials were immediately alerted, and swift action was taken to provide medical assistance to those affected.

Medical teams were deployed to the village, where they began administering first aid and monitoring the condition of the patients. According to officials, several individuals with mild symptoms were treated onsite by healthcare personnel stationed in Bettanahalli as a precautionary measure.

Meanwhile, those who showed signs of severe illness were transported to nearby hospitals via ambulances for further treatment. Health authorities are closely monitoring the situation and ensuring that all affected individuals receive timely medical care.

Officials noted that food distribution during Ram Navami has been a long-standing tradition at the temple, and such incidents had not been reported in previous years. The sudden outbreak of illness following the consumption of prasad has raised concerns about food safety and hygiene practices during large gatherings.

Authorities are expected to investigate the cause of the contamination and take necessary steps to prevent similar incidents in the future.

6-yr-old girl raped, murdered near Electronics City

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

A six-year-old girl was allegedly raped and brutally murdered near Electronic City in Bengaluru, triggering widespread outrage and renewed concerns over child safety in the city. The incident, reported from the Araluru area, has sent shockwaves across the community.

Police said the victim belonged to a migrant family from Assam, which had moved to Bengaluru in search of livelihood. The child's parents, who are engaged in daily wage work, were living in Araluru along with their daughter.

According to the complaint, the girl went missing on Thursday evening while playing near her residence.

When she did not return home, her parents and neighbours began searching the surrounding areas but found no trace of her. A missing person complaint was subsequently lodged at the Electronic City Police Station on Friday.

WAR OVER HINDI

Priyank Kharge questions BJP over Hindi policy

CH NEWS, BENGALURU

In Bengaluru, Rural Development Minister Priyank Kharge has raised strong concerns over the ongoing debate on granting grade marks for the SSLC Hindi language examination, questioning the broader implications of promoting Hindi over regional languages.

Addressing the media in Bengaluru, Priyank Kharge criticized leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for questioning the state government's decision to provide grade marks in the SSLC Hindi exam. He argued that instead of merely opposing the move, BJP leaders should clarify what tangible benefits arise from the promotion or imposition of Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking regions.

Kharge further alleged that state BJP leaders are primarily focused on appeasing Union Home Minister Amit Shah, rather than addressing the linguistic and cultural concerns of Karnataka. He emphasized that language policies should prioritize the development and preservation of regional languages rather than promoting one language at the expense of others.

Highlighting disparities in funding, Kharge pointed out that the central government has allocated thousands of crores of rupees for the promotion of Sanskrit, while Kannada has reportedly received less than Rs 20 crore over the past decade. He described this as a significant imbalance and questioned whether the central government holds any responsibility toward nurturing state languages.

The minister also reiterated the demand for recognition and support for Tulu, a language spoken in parts of coastal Karnataka. He stated that the state government has already submitted a proposal to the Centre seeking official recognition and greater support for Tulu.

Raising a broader concern, Kharge questioned whether Members of Parliament have actively fought for issues related to land, water, and language — key elements of regional identity. He stressed that equitable linguistic policies are essential for preserving cultural diversity and ensuring that regional languages receive the respect and resources they deserve.

QUICK READ

Confident of victory in Bagalkot, Davanagere: Minister Rahim Khan

Bidar

Minister for Municipal Administration Rahim Khan expressed confidence that his party will secure victory in both Bagalkot and Davangere constituencies in the upcoming elections. Speaking to the media, the minister said that substantial development work has been carried out in both regions, which would translate into strong public support during the polls. He added that the party is optimistic about a favourable response from voters. Rahim Khan also made a significant remark stating that Kerala is expected to be in their favor this time. However, he did not elaborate further and said that complete details regarding the party's strategy and prospects would be shared in the coming days. The minister's statement comes amid heightened political activity ahead of the elections, with parties intensifying their campaigns and outreach efforts across key constituencies.

Yadrami celebrates grand Sri Basaveshwara Jatra

Yadrami

Yadrami town witnessed a spectacular celebration of the Sri Basaveshwara Jatra with thousands of devotees participating in the grand Rathotsava. The procession began at 6 pm, flagged off by Siddalinga Mahaswamiji of Yadrami Virakta Mutt. The chariot, beautifully decorated with sugarcane, banana stems, and traditional symbols, moved slowly as devotees cheered "Basaveshwara Maharaj ki Jai" and offered coconuts, bananas, and other items in devotion. The crowd grew larger as the chariot reached Padagatte, reflecting the community's enthusiasm and faith. Earlier in the day, special poojas, including abhisheka and aarti, were performed at the temple. Devotees also prepared traditional offerings like holige, kadabu, and uggi. The temple premises were brightly lit, adding to the festive spirit.

Retired employees protest against centre's pension revision policy

Kalaburagi

A large group of retired employees staged a protest in Kalaburagi against the Central Government's pension revision policy. The rally was organized by the All India Federation of Pensioners and the State Government Retired Employees Association. Protesters marched from the Retired Employees' Bhavan to the Tahsildar's office, wearing black armbands and raising slogans against the government. They voiced strong opposition to the recent bill introduced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, which revises pension and family pension benefits. The retirees claimed that the policy reduces the dearness allowance, previously provided twice a year, and described it as unfair. They also criticized the bill's passage in Parliament, warning that it could threaten the financial security of retired employees.

Policy confusion, political tussle stall development in Karnataka: Chalavadi

Narayanaswamy criticized Siddaramaiah, saying announcing Hindi's optional status now causes confusion, injustice, and affects students, teachers

KALABURAGI

Karnataka Legislative Council Opposition Leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy has sharply criticized the state government for its recent stance on Hindi under the National Education Policy (NEP), calling it "ill-timed and harmful to students."

Speaking to the media in Kalaburagi, Narayanaswamy said Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's announcement that Hindi is not mandatory in the state should have been made at the start of the academic year, not just before exams. "Students have studied Hindi all year and teachers have been paid salaries. Changing the policy now will create confusion and injustice," he said.

He questioned whether teachers who taught Hindi would be affected and urged the government to allow students to take exams and receive marks. Narayanaswamy added that last-minute changes to education policy amount to "cheating students, parents, and teachers."

Turning to broader political issues, he alleged that internal power-sharing disputes within the ruling Congress party have stalled development in Karnataka. "There is zero progress in the state due to political conflicts," he claimed. On by-elections, Narayanaswamy expressed confidence that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would win both seats, suggesting this could challenge the stability of the current government. He also noted that while the party faces hurdles in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, it is likely to form governments in other states.

The Opposition leader further criticized the state government's guarantee schemes, highlighting alleged financial irregularities. He claimed ₹5,000 crore from the Grihalakshmi scheme has not reached beneficiaries and accused the government of diverting ₹53,000 crore meant for Dalits under the ACP-TSP framework. "Not a single rupee of the ₹54,000 crore budgeted has reached Dalits. This is serious injustice," he charged.

Narayanaswamy concluded by warning that dissatisfaction among Dalits and minorities will influence upcoming elections. "We will win the by-elections, and in the next two years, BJP will come to power in Karnataka," he asserted.

This article has been carefully condensed to ensure clarity, neutrality, and simplicity while reflecting Narayanaswamy's key statements and political concerns.

GADAG–HOTGI DOUBLE RAILWAY LINE COMPLETED

VIJAYAPURA

The much-awaited Gadag–Hotgi double railway line project, which connects North and South Karnataka and also strengthens links to North India, has been fully completed. The development is expected to significantly ease rail travel, particularly from Vijayapura to major cities like Bengaluru and Mysuru.

The 284-km double line project, which began in 2017, had faced prolonged delays due to challenging construction work. A major hurdle was the 9.60-km stretch between Almatti and Vandal, which included a bridge over the Parvatikatti stream. The construction of an open web girder bridge—featuring nine spans of 45.72 meters each—along with minor bridges and a road overbridge, was completed just two days ago, paving the way for full operational readiness of the route.

With the completion of the double line, railway capacity on the route has increased substantially. This will ensure better punctuality, faster movement of passenger and freight trains, and allow the introduction of additional train services. Until now, train operations on the single line often caused delays due to crossing issues, leading to extended travel times and frequent disruptions. At times, services were suspended for months, causing inconvenience to daily commuters. The completion of the project is expected to resolve these issues.

KEY BENEFITS FOR PASSENGERS:

- Completion of the long-pending Almatti–Vandal stretch
- Reduction in train delays
- Increased route capacity
- Shorter travel duration
- Scope for introduction of superfast trains

REDUCED TRAVEL TIME

Earlier, the Vijayapura–Bengaluru journey used to take around 14–15 hours due to single-line constraints. With the double line now operational, the travel time is expected to come down to 10–11 hours.

DEMAND FOR MORE SERVICES:

Following the project's completion, there is growing demand for additional train services on the Solapur–Vijayapura–Hubballi–Bengaluru route. Passengers and railway activists are urging authorities to introduce Vande Bharat trains and superfast services connecting Mumbai, New Delhi, and other major cities. Ashok Hallur, President of the Vijayapura Railway Struggle Committee, expressed satisfaction over the completion of the long-delayed project. He emphasized the need for faster trains between Vijayapura and Bengaluru and called for daily connectivity to major destinations such as New Delhi and Varanasi. The completion of the Gadag–Hotgi double line marks a significant milestone in improving rail infrastructure and connectivity in the region...

People unite for caste, religion but not for development: Laxman Dasti

KALABURAGI

Expressing concern over the backwardness of the Kalyana Karnataka region, Kalyana Karnataka Horata Samiti Founder President Laxman Dasti said that while people readily unite for issues related to caste and religion, they fail to come together for development-oriented struggles.He was speaking at the 3rd annual Rashtrakuta Utsav and Kalyana Ratna award ceremony organized by Kalyana Nadu Vikasa Vedike at Kannada Bhavan in the city.Dasti pointed out that, as per the Prof. Govindrao Committee report, out of the 69 most backward taluks in the state, 39 belong to the Kalyana Karnataka region, highlighting its developmental lag. He termed it unfortunate that a land once ruled by the mighty Rashtrakuta Empire—one of the great empires in world history—remains backward today. He urged the state government to officially organize the Rashtrakuta Utsav on the lines of Dasara and Hampi Utsav, stating that it would boost tourism and contribute to economic and social development in the region.asti also noted that the region has a rich historical and cultural legacy, including early Kannada literary works like Kavirajamarga and significant contributions to knowledge and governance, but lamented that lack of awareness about this heritage has contributed to its neglect. Former MLC Amarnath Patil, who also spoke on the occasion, said the Rashtrakutas had made significant contributions to the region. He stressed that the historic Malkhed Fort, associated with the Rashtrakutas, remains neglected and must be developed by the government at the earliest.

Ram Navami celebrated with grandeur in Teggelli village

YADGIR

Ram Navami was celebrated with great devotion and enthusiasm in Teggelli village of Hunasagi taluk in Yadgir district.

A grand procession of Lord Rama was taken out across the village with much fanfare. The Shobha Yatra began from the Maruti Temple and passed through the main streets, with devotees chanting "Jai Shri Ram" and raising religious slogans. Villagers participated in large numbers, carrying saffron flags and wearing saffron scarves, creating a vibrant and festive atmosphere. Despite the scorching heat, the enthusiasm of the youth and devotees remained high throughout the celebrations. The event was organized by the Vipra community of Teggelli village, who have been conducting the Ram Navami celebrations every year in a traditional and grand manner.

Following the procession, various religious rituals were held at the Maruti Temple. The rituals included stotra recitations, Vishnu Sahasranama parayana, Panchamruta abhisheka to Lord Maruti, and special decorations. The ceremonies were conducted under the guidance of seers from Kudalagi Math, who also flagged off the procession.

Several prominent villagers and community members, including Lachappagouda Police Patil, Taranath Inamdar, Shankaragouda Police Patil, Ramanna Malipatil, Raghanna Malimath, Jagannath Kulkarni, Prakash, Girish Police Patil, Shantanand Inamdar, Gundu, Manjunath, Sheshagiri, and Hallerao Malipatil, were present on the occasion.

The celebration once again highlighted the strong cultural and religious spirit of the village.

Namma clinic inaugurated at Kalaburagi Central Bus Stand to serve the poor

KALABURAGI

A newly established Namma Clinic aimed at providing accessible healthcare services to the underprivileged was inaugurated at the city's Central Bus Stand by Allamaprabhu Patil, MLA of Kalaburagi South constituency. Speaking on the occasion, he said the clinic has been set up keeping in mind the health needs of poor people, daily commuters from various taluks and villages, and staff of the Kalyana Karnataka Road Transport Corporation. He added that the initiative will significantly benefit those who require immediate and affordable medical attention while traveling.

He further informed that around 20 Namma Clinics are currently functioning across Kalaburagi district, including 14 clinics within the city limits, providing essential healthcare services to the public.

On the same occasion, Arunkumar M Y Patil, Chairman of KKRTC, termed the initiative a commendable step towards strengthening healthcare access for the poor. He instructed KKRTC officials to make hourly announcements through the public address system at the bus stand to create awareness about the availability of services at the clinic.District Health and Family Welfare Officer Dr Sharanabasappa Kyatanal highlighted the achievements of the program, stating that since 2023, over 4 lakh outpatients have been treated in the district, with more than 55,000 laboratory tests conducted. Additionally, around 4,000 yoga camps have been organized benefiting over 50,000 people, and 650 health camps have provided treatment to more than 25,000 individuals.

Two bikers killed after crashing into parked lorry in Raichur

RAICHUR

Two bikers were killed on the spot after their motorcycle rammed into a lorry parked on the roadside near Kunnatagi Camp petrol station in Sindhanur taluk of Raichur district.

The deceased have been identified as Mallanagowda Kannur (37) and Virupakshi (38). According to police, the duo was travelling from Sindhanur to their native place Kannur when their bike collided with a lorry that had been parked on the side of the road due to a puncture.

The impact of the collision was severe, resulting in the instant death of both riders. The Sindhanur Rural Police Sub-Inspector, along with his team, visited the spot and conducted an inspection. A case has been registered at the Sindhanur Rural Police Station, and further investigation is underway.

Auto drivers protest LPG price hike in Kalaburagi

KALABURAGI

Hundreds of auto-rickshaw drivers staged a protest in the city against the sudden hike in LPG prices used for autos, terming it unjustified and burdensome. The protesters later submitted a memorandum to the district administration, urging immediate intervention.The drivers alleged that LPG bunk owners have arbitrarily increased the prices without providing any valid reason, placing a heavy financial strain on already struggling drivers. They expressed anger over what they called an "unfair and unilateral" decision.Auto drivers pointed out that with the rising number of autos in Kalaburagi, their daily income has already been affected. "Even after working the whole day, we are unable to earn enough for basic survival. In such a situation, the sudden hike in LPG prices is a severe blow to our livelihood," they said.They further questioned why LPG prices for autos alone have been increased, while there has been no corresponding rise in petrol, diesel, or domestic cylinder rates. According to them, this indicates a deliberate attempt by gas agencies to exploit auto drivers and extract excess money.

THOUSANDS CELEBRATE PALM SUNDAY WITH PRAYERS

CHIKKABALLAPURA

A special prayer for world peace marked the Palm Sunday festival at CSI Christ Church, led by Reverend Praveen. The pastor emphasized that Jesus Christ, a messenger of peace, rode a donkey—not a horse, a symbol of war—into Jerusalem, spreading a message of harmony that continues to inspire people globally.The festival began with the usual Sunday service, after which a colorful procession moved through the town's main streets. Thousands of church members shouted "Hosanna, Hosanna" as they walked in celebration. Children enacted key scenes, including Jesus riding a donkey, carrying the cross, and being followed by his disciples, bringing joy to onlookers.Reverend Praveen said prayers were offered to end global unrest and promote peace and unity among nations. "The message of Palm Sunday reminds us to choose peace over conflict," he said.Church officials, including Secretary V. Das, Treasurer Henry Prasanna Kumar, and Governing Body members J. Kiran Victor, Swami Das, Adarsh, Rajashekar, Sandeep, Paul, and Sasikala Simon participated. Elders S. Winston Kennedy, Devdas, ASI Mohan, and Florence Nightingale also attended, adding to the solemnity of the occasion.The procession concluded with blessings from Reverend Praveen, reminding all that Palm Sunday is not only a celebration of history but also a call to live peacefully, spread love, and maintain faith in troubled times. The community left inspired, carrying the spirit of harmony into their daily lives.

QUICK READ

Gas shortage hits Haveri children's food centre

Haveri

The Vatsalya Kendra at Devaraj Urs Bhavan faced a cooking gas shortage, disrupting meals for children on Sunday. The centre usually serves porridge, dal khichdi, and boiled eggs daily. With the cylinder empty, parents were asked to provide snacks for the next two days. Teacher Geetha informed parents about the temporary arrangement. On learning this, Chaitanya contacted the supporting NGO. Majeed, the director, visited and promised to arrange a new cylinder immediately. He explained the shortage was due to the war affecting supply and assured that such disruptions would be avoided in the future to ensure children's meals continue smoothly.

Lecturer found burnt, mystery deepens in village

Shivamogga

A shocking incident has come to light from Hanumanthapur village near Holehonnuru, where a college lecturer was found dead in a burnt condition. The deceased has been identified as Suresh, aged 58, who was working at a private college in Shivamogga. The body was discovered in an areca nut plantation owned by him. Nearby farmers noticed flames and rushed to the spot, later informing the police. By the time officials arrived and controlled the fire, the body was partially burnt. Police from Holehonnuru station, along with senior officers, inspected the area and began an investigation.

Shiggaon hosts grand Mylaralingeshwara festival

Shiggaon

The Mylaralingeshwara Kalasarohana and Anjaneya Jatra began at Hanumarahalli village in Shiggavi taluk with great enthusiasm. The five-day festival is attended by Ramesh Mahaswamy of Lakshmeshwara. Morning rituals included religious programmes followed by a palanquin procession through the village. A highlight was the miracle of a flowing iron chain performed by Goravappa. Hundreds of devotees from nearby villages joined, seeking blessings from Mylaralingeshwara. The fair will continue for four more days with daily pravachana, dasoha, and cultural programmes, keeping tradition alive and offering a vibrant spiritual and cultural experience for all attendees.

Prabha Mallikarjuna campaigns for Cong candidate

Prabha praised Congress for welfare, education, law and order, social justice, and urged voters to support continued development

DAVANAGERE

Congress leader Dr. Prabha Mallikarjuna carried out an extensive campaign in Davanagere South constituency, seeking support for party candidate Samarth Shamanur Mallikarjuna ahead of the by-election.

She visited several villages including Shiramagondanahalli, Hosabelavanur Thanda, Belavanur, Ujjinipura, and Chandrenahalli. Walking through the villages, she interacted directly with residents and appealed to them to vote for the Congress candidate.

During her campaign, she said the Congress government has worked towards improving people's lives by providing welfare schemes at their doorstep. She highlighted guarantee schemes and said they have helped many families become financially and socially stable. She urged voters to support the party for continued development.

She also said the government has focused on education, law and order, and ensuring a peaceful life for citizens. According to her, the administration has always stood for social justice and equality. Speaking on the occasion, Samarth Shamanur Mallikarjuna remembered the contributions of Shivashankarappa. He said Shivashankarappa worked for all communities equally and served people without discrimination. He added that he is following the same path and requested voters to support him.

During the visit, the leaders also took part in the chariot festival of Sri Basaveshwara Swamy in Belavanur and offered prayers at the temple.

Several party leaders, workers, and supporters joined the campaign and expressed confidence in the candidate's victory.

Tribal issues highlighted at Hunsur student camp

HUNSUR

Serious concerns about the living conditions of tribal communities were raised during a student camp held in Hunsur taluk. Professor Dr. Madhumala said the government is not properly implementing laws related to forest rights and tribal welfare.

The camp was organized by MSW students of Alva's College Moodbidri in collaboration with a local institute. It was held at Madyayanakatte Jenukurubar Hadi and concluded recently with discussions on key social issues.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Madhumala said tribal people still lack proper rehabilitation, quality education, and the right to self-determination. Students who interacted with residents said they would write to the government highlighting these issues.

Hadi leader Raju shared the difficulties faced by 45 families living in the settlement. He said they depend on daily labour and have not received forest rights. He added that some families cultivating land are facing problems due to encroachment. Electricity has also been cut in some houses, and children are forced to travel far for school, leading to dropouts. Advocate Pavithra Sridhar assured support in solving land and women's issues through legal aid.

Dr. Madhumala highlighted tribal struggles, including education, rehabilitation, and rights; students raised awareness, while Raju and Pavithra Sridhar addressed land, forest, and women's issues.

Students said the camp helped them understand real-life challenges. They visited nearby places and took part in awareness activities. Street plays and songs were performed on forest rights and social problems like alcoholism.

Certificates were distributed to participants. The camp ended with discussions on social work, democracy, and rural development, leaving students with new learning and awareness.

Manjunath provided funds for school repairs, urged swift work, supported injured residents, and called for quick electricity restoration

Storm relief work brings hope in Hunsur

HUNSUR

Former MLA H. P. Manjunath visited storm-affected villages in Hanagodu hobli of Hunsur taluk and supported families who suffered heavy damage due to recent rain and strong winds.

He visited Dasanapura, Kirangur, Kamagoudanahalli, and Haralli villages, where several houses were damaged. A total of 27 houses received help, including tiles, asbestos sheets, wooden materials, and financial aid. Residents welcomed the support and said it gave them relief during a difficult time.

Speaking to reporters, Manjunath said that two rooms of a government junior primary school were badly damaged. He provided Rs. 50,000 and tiles to repair the classrooms and handed them over to the school development committee. He urged villagers to complete the repair work quickly so that children's education is not affected. He also assured more help if needed.

Two people injured during the storm were given financial assistance for their treatment. He also raised concerns about damaged electricity poles in the affected villages and informed officials to restore power supply quickly.

Farmers in the area also faced losses due to hailstorm and heavy rain. Tobacco seedlings, banana crops, and watermelon fields were damaged. Manjunath spoke to Laxmikant Reddy and requested higher compensation for the affected farmers.

Villagers said timely support and quick action are needed to help them recover fully from the disaster.

Free watermelon aid brings relief to farmers

SHIDLAGHATTA

Farmers in Shidlaghatta taluk of Chikkaballapur district are facing serious distress due to falling crop prices and market problems. Local leader Puttu Anjinappa stepped in to support them during this difficult time.

Farmers said they did not get fair prices for their produce, especially watermelon crops. Traders either offered very low rates or refused to buy the produce. One farmer, Chikkanarayana Reddy, had invested nearly Rs. 5 lakh in six acres of watermelon cultivation but could not find buyers.

Seeing their struggle, Anjinappa decided to help. Instead of letting the crops go to waste, he bought the entire produce from the farmers. However, instead of selling it for profit, he chose to distribute the watermelons free of cost to people in both rural and urban areas.

With summer heat rising, fruits like watermelon are in high demand. Taking advantage of this need, the free distribution helped both farmers and the public. Many families received fresh fruits, while farmers got financial support.

Residents appreciated the move and said it brought relief during a tough period. People also recalled the social work done during the COVID-19 pandemic when essentials and support were provided to those in need.

Locals said such actions show the importance of community support during crises. Farmers expressed hope that authorities will also take steps to ensure fair prices and better market facilities in the future to avoid similar problems.

Morning liquor culture in Vijayapura: Who pays the real price?

VIJAYAPURA

In clear violation of excise norms, several bars and restaurants in the city are reportedly opening as early as 6 to 7 in the morning, raising serious concerns about law enforcement and public welfare. Among those frequently cited by locals is Symphony Bar and Restaurant, which is situated Al Ameen Road beside MRPL Petrol pump. has allegedly been operating beyond permitted hours without any visible checks from authorities....

Excise rules are put in place not just to regulate business, but to maintain social balance and protect families from the adverse effects of alcohol abuse. However, in Vijayapura, the ground reality paints a different picture—one where rules appear optional, and enforcement is either weak or selectively applied.

The most severe impact of this negligence is not seen inside the bars, but inside the homes.

When men start drinking early in the morning, it disrupts the entire household. Women, in particular, bear the brunt of this unchecked culture. They are forced to manage financial instability, domestic conflicts, and emotional stress—all before the day even properly begins. For many families, mornings are no longer about work or routine, but about dealing with intoxicated husbands, Sons, Brothers and the uncertainty that follows.

Children in such households also suffer silently. Their education, mental health, and sense of security are deeply affected when a parent is caught in a cycle of alcohol dependency, fueled by easy and early access to liquor.

The question that arises is simple: Where is the Excise Department?

Is there a lack of monitoring? Or is there a failure to act despite knowing the violations? When bars openly defy regulations and continue operations without fear, it reflects poorly on the system meant to regulate them.

Authorities must understand that this is not just about business hours—it is about social responsibility. Strict action must be taken against establishments violating excise laws. Regular inspections, penalties, and even license suspensions should be enforced to ensure compliance. More importantly, there needs to be a people-centric approach. Policies should prioritize the well-being of families, especially women who are disproportionately affected by alcohol misuse in society. If the system continues to look the other way, the cost will not just be legal—it will be deeply human. It is time for the Excise Department to act, before more homes are quietly broken every morning.

RTO seizes unsafe bus after owner negligence

CHALLAKERE

In a serious safety crackdown, the Chitradurga RTO has seized a private bus for operating illegally without valid insurance and a fitness certificate. The bus, named "SRJ," was traveling via Nayakanahatti, Kottur, Khanavasahalli, and Hagari Bommanahalli when authorities discovered the violations.

The investigation revealed that the bus insurance had expired in 2024, and no fitness certificate was available. Despite this, passengers were being transported daily, raising serious concerns about public safety. Officials described the negligence as "inhuman" because it put lives at risk.

With road accidents on the rise in recent months, the public has expressed alarm over such violations. Many residents questioned whether victims would receive proper compensation if an accident occurred. The incident has sparked calls for stricter monitoring of private buses to prevent illegal operations and ensure passenger safety.

Chitradurga RTO officials conducted a surprise raid on Sunday morning, seized the bus, and registered a legal case against the owner. Authorities stressed that regular inspections are crucial to prevent such negligence and to hold private operators accountable.

Local residents have urged the RTO and other transport authorities to take firm action against repeat offenders. They hope this enforcement will act as a warning to other private bus operators and improve road safety in the region.

Hindi marks row sparks outrage among students and private schools

BIDAR

A recent decision by the state government to not award marks for Hindi in the upcoming Class 10 examinations has triggered strong opposition from students, parents, and private school associations across Karnataka.

According to education stakeholders, more than 8 lakh Class 10 students have studied Hindi throughout the academic year, with the subject carrying a total of 100 marks, including 20 marks for internal assessment and 80 marks for the written examination. However, the sudden announcement—made just days before the examination—that marks will not be awarded has led to widespread confusion and concern.

Revanasiddappa Jalade, State President of the Akhil Karnataka Private School Association, termed the decision "completely unfair and unacceptable." He stated that students who have dedicated an entire year to studying Hindi are now being denied proper evaluation of their efforts.

"In a Democratic system, students have the right to learn languages of their choice. While Kannada is the first language and English the second, Hindi is offered as a third language. Students who opted for Hindi deserve justice," he said.

He further urged the government to immediately withdraw the order and ensure that marks are awarded as per the existing scheme. Education experts warn that such last-minute changes not only disrupt academic planning but also create unnecessary stress among students and parents. The association has called for urgent intervention by the authorities, emphasizing that the interests and future of lakhs of students must not be compromised.

PROSPERITY FOR FARMERS

MLA Veerendra Pappi pledges support for farmers

CHITRADURGA

MLA K. C. Veerendra Pappi assured farmers that he will always stand by them and work for their welfare. He spoke during the inauguration of the Karnataka State Farmers' Union branch in Bhimasamudra village on Sunday.

He said farmers play a key role in feeding the nation and their prosperity is important for the country's growth. However, he noted that farmers face many challenges, especially not getting fair prices for their crops. He promised to support schemes that benefit farmers and address their problems sincerely.

Veerendra Pappi also said that unity among farmers can bring major changes. He assured farmers in the region that he would support them in solving local issues and stand with them in their struggles.

Farmer leader Puttannaiah said farmers often fall into debt due to poor market prices. He blamed middlemen for taking most of the profits while farmers suffer losses.

Speakers also raised concerns about mining activities affecting agriculture. Dust from mines is damaging crops and impacting people's health. Farmers said they are unable to grow quality produce and groundwater levels are also decreasing.

Religious leader Praveen Guruji stressed the need to protect the environment, saying farming and nature are closely connected.

Farmers' union leaders demanded better policies and opposed certain government measures like smart meters for pump sets.

Many leaders and farmers attended the event and discussed ways to improve agriculture and support rural communities.

KOPPAL PROTEST MARKS 150 DAYS AGAINST DIVERSION

Prabhu Bettadooru vowed continued struggle, while Gondaba stressed legal lake protection; leaders, activists, and residents emphasized Basapura Lake's importance

KOPPAL

The ongoing anti-Baldota struggle reached 150 days on Sunday as locals and environmental activists formed a human chain at Ashoka Circle to oppose the diversion of Basapura Lake. The protest, led by the Koppal District Bachao Andolan Samiti and the Environmental Protection Forum, continues to demand the government protect the lake and respect the rights of affected communities.

Senior writer Dr. Shyamasundara Bidarakundi, who came from Hubli, visited villages impacted by the diversion and expressed shock at the harsh living conditions. He urged officials to see the residents as humans, not just

voters, and announced he would return on the 200th day to support the cause.

Joint Action Forum General Convener Allama Prabhu Bettadooru said the struggle would continue as long as needed but warned that the government must recognize the people's concerns before the community takes matters into their own hands. Convener Manjunath G. Gondaba explained legal measures available for lake protection, emphasizing the importance of preserving Basapura Lake.

Several leaders, activists, and local residents joined the event, including Mallikarjuna B. Gonal, Dr. Manjunath Sajjan, Santosh Deshpande, women leaders Jyoti M. Gondaba, Savitri Muzumada, and others. Participants highlighted the environmental and social importance of the lake and reiterated their determination to protect it. The protest has drawn attention to the broader issue of water resource management in Koppal and inspired solidarity from neighboring villages. Organizers said they will continue raising awareness, involving the community, and pressing the authorities to halt any diversion that threatens the environment and the livelihoods of local people. The human chain and speeches underscored unity, resilience, and the community's strong commitment to defending Basapura Lake for present and future generations.

QUICK READ

Kalaburagi fines 136 for fake medical practice

Kalaburagi

A total of 136 people were fined Rs 45.80 lakh for providing medical services without proper qualifications, violating the Karnataka Private Medical Institutions Act, 2007. Deputy Commissioner Fauzia Tarannum chaired a meeting to enforce the penalties. Officials directed continuous raids on hospitals and clinics run by unlicensed practitioners. Tahsildars were instructed to seize property and file cases against those who have not paid fines. Health department raids covered 182 hospitals, with only 46 paying fines so far. Medical officers, specialists, and program officials attended the meeting, emphasizing strict action to prevent illegal medical practice and safeguard public health.

Citizens criticize free IPL tickets for lawmakers

Hunsur

Citizens in Karnataka are upset as the government distributed free IPL tickets to elected representatives, with each MLA receiving two tickets. Critics say crores of public money are being wasted while pressing issues remain unresolved. Satyappa, president of Satya Foundation, revealed that 224 MLAs and 70 council members received 700–800 tickets, costing over 4 crore rupees. People are demanding attention to urgent matters like stalled land surveys affecting 2,500 farmers, broken UGD fittings, and water problems. Many feel lawmakers prioritize VIP access to cricket matches over public welfare, raising concerns about governance and democracy.

Mega health camp brings care to villages

MAGADI

H. N. Ashok emphasized villagers' health as key to national progress; Krishnamurthy highlighted free medical camps aiding rural families with tests and hospital care in Bengaluru

A large free health camp was held in Magadi taluk, bringing medical services closer to rural people. The camp took place at Harti Gate Government High School and was organized by M. S. Ramaiah Hospital along with charitable trusts. BDCC Bank Chairman and Bamul Director H. N. Ashok said a healthy society is the first step for the country's progress. He stressed that improving the health of farmers and workers in villages is very important for building a strong nation. He added that such camps have already been held in nearby areas and will continue regularly.

Magadi Block Congress President K. Krishnamurthy said the camp is a big help for poor families. He explained that many rural people cannot afford costly treatment in cities like Bengaluru. At the camp, free blood tests, scans, and check-ups were done using mobile labs. Patients needing further care will be taken to hospitals in Bengaluru for free treatment.

Special buses were arranged to bring people from villages and drop them back. Food, drinks, medicines, and free spectacles were provided to the needy.

An elderly beneficiary, Nanjamma, said she has been suffering from diabetes for years and found the free treatment very helpful.

Doctors treated patients for blood pressure, diabetes, bone issues, and women's health problems. Many local leaders, officials, teachers, and medical staff attended the camp and supported the initiative.

Enjoy IPL safely and avoid betting, says Ahmed

SRINIVASPUR

Amid rising excitement over the Indian Premier League, social leader Shabbir Ahmed has urged young people to enjoy cricket as entertainment and stay away from betting.

In a statement released on Saturday, Ahmed said the IPL brings joy to millions, but the growing link between matches and gambling is worrying. He warned that many youth are being attracted by the idea of quick money, which can lead to serious problems.

He explained that betting is illegal and harmful. What starts with small amounts can soon grow into heavy financial losses. Many people, he said, have lost large sums of money and suffered stress, anxiety, and depression.

Ahmed noted that during matches, some individuals risk big money hoping to earn profits quickly. However, results often go against them, leading to financial trouble and emotional pain. He said such habits can push youth towards risky paths and affect their future.

He added that the impact of betting is not limited to individuals. Families also suffer due to debts and conflicts, disturbing peace at home. At a wider level, it can create social problems.

Iqbal Hussain praised Agni Bannirayaswamy, urged Thigalar unity; Dr. Ravi highlighted agricultural, cultural, historical contributions

Agni Bannirayaswamy Jayanti celebrated with unity message

RAMANAGARA

Agni Bannirayaswamy Jayanti was celebrated with devotion and enthusiasm in Ramanagara, with leaders highlighting the importance of unity and cultural pride. The event was held at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Bhavan and organized by the district administration along with other departments.

MLA H. A. Iqbal Hussain said Agni Bannirayaswamy was known for truth, courage, and strong values. He added that the Thigalar community has a long tradition of protecting society and preserving culture. He urged community members to stay united for progress and prosperity.

He also announced that future Jayanti celebrations would be held in a new community hall planned in the town.

Folklore expert Dr. Ravi U. M. spoke about the contribution of the Thigalar community to society. He said they have played a key role in agriculture, especially in growing flowers and vegetables, and have a rich history of bravery. He also mentioned their role in cultural traditions like the famous Karaga festival.

A colorful procession was held before the main event, starting from the district stadium. It was flagged off by K. Seshadri. Folk performances such as Dollukunita added vibrancy to the celebrations.

Several leaders, officials, and community members attended the programme. Speakers praised the community's heritage and called for preserving traditions while working towards development.

The event ended with a message of unity, encouraging people to follow the values of truth, courage, and service in their lives.

Magadi Prepares for Sri Ranganathaswamy Brahmarathotsava Festival

MAGADI

Magadi is preparing for the grand Sri Ranganathaswamy Brahmarathotsava, a famous religious event that attracts thousands of devotees every year. The festival will be held on April 1 during the auspicious Uttara Nakshatra Abhijit Muhurta between 11:30 am and 12:15 pm with traditional rituals.

Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple Magadi is known as a sacred place linked to sage Mandavya Maharishi. Surrounded by hills, rivers, and holy spots, the town is considered divine by devotees. Historical records say rulers like Rajendra Chola I and Kempegowda II helped develop the region.

The temple has a rich past and is believed to be connected to Tirumala traditions. Devotees worship a rare Saligrama said to have been used by Mandavya Maharishi. The idol of Lord Ranganathaswamy in a reclining posture attracts visitors daily.

During the festival, lakhs of devotees gather to pull the grand chariot while chanting "Govinda." Free food, buttermilk, and drinks are served continuously for three days. Local communities come together to offer meals like ragi mudde, rice, and dal.

Special buses will be arranged from nearby cities to manage the crowd. MLA H. C. Balakrishna has directed officials to ensure smooth transport and facilities.

The temple and chariot have been newly decorated with lights and colors. A grant of Rs. 5 crore has been announced to further develop the temple as a tourist center.

Shops, fairs, and cultural attractions add to the festive spirit, making the event a memorable experience for visitors.

Hatti citizens seek new railway station construction

HATTI

Residents of Hatti have petitioned South Western Railway to build a station near the Hatti gold mine on the Gadag-Wadi line. The Hatti Town Citizens' Committee said the town, with over 50,000 people, generates significant mining revenue and needs rail connectivity for growth. A station would aid passengers and transport of mining materials, boosting economic activity. Leaders including Suresh Gowda Gurikara and others submitted the request, urging authorities to consider long-term benefits.

KUDUR POLICE ARREST CHAIN SNATCHERS WITHIN DAY

MAGADI

Kudur police in Magadi taluk have arrested two chain snatchers within 24 hours of a daring theft incident, bringing quick relief to the victim and earning public praise. The accused had snatched a gold chain from a woman and escaped on a bike.

The incident took place on Friday around 2 pm near Annapoorneshwari Bakery. The victim, Ambika, was waiting near the bakery while travelling to Nelamangala. Two men approached her pretending to buy a cold drink. In a sudden move, one of them pulled the gold chain from her neck while the other waited on a bike. The woman fell down and the accused fled before help could arrive.

Based on her complaint, Kudur police quickly registered a case and formed a special team. CCTV footage from the bakery played a key role in identifying the suspects. Using technical clues, police tracked the accused to Bengaluru and arrested them. The arrested have been identified as Muthuraju, aged 26, and Srinivas, aged 38. Both are originally from different taluks but were staying in Dasarahalli in Bengaluru. Police recovered a 41-gram gold chain from them.

Officials said the accused were involved in similar crimes and further investigation is ongoing to check their links to other cases. The swift action by CPI Chandrashekhar, PSI Tippesh, and their team has been widely appreciated. Local residents praised the police for acting quickly and ensuring justice.

Dr. J. Kariappa Malige honoured for cultural research

CHITRADURGA

Cultural thinker Dr. S. Nataraj Budalu praised Dr. J. Kariappa Malige for his deep research into the heritage and philosophy of Chitradurga at the Nade-Nudi tribute program held on Sunday at the Sports Hall near the Zilla Panchayat office. The program was organized by the Journalists' Association, Ashaya, and included a special lecture on Malige's work and legacy.

Budalu described Malige as a rare researcher who has explored the essence of the soil and culture of the region. Highlighting Chitradurga's diversity, he noted that communities like hunters, fishermen, salt miners, shepherds, Dalits, and Muslims have lived together harmoniously, and Malige's work reflects this cultural unity. Through his philosophical studies, he has introduced hundreds of lesser-known thinkers such as Honnenahalli Dasagiri Ajaja, Sakkerppa Tata, Veerappa Tata, and Karim Peera to the cultural world.

Dr. Lokesh Agasanakatte, a literary critic, said Malige's writing mirrors life itself, while poet Tarini Shubhadayini emphasized that his research explores human culture through proverbs, folk tales, and local traditions. His work on village histories, including the 'Village History Archive' at Folklore University, involved meticulous fieldwork, verifying oral traditions directly in villages. Poet Chandrashekhar Thalya called Malige a "son of the soil," praising his ability to connect with students and colleagues with love and respect. Storyteller Gangadhar highlighted Malige's social commitment, noting that retirement does not stop his creative contributions.

Journalist Gounahalli Govindappa and senior journalist M.N. Yogesh praised Malige's trustworthiness, discipline, and devotion to research. His wife, Mahadevamma, was also honored at the event.

Attendees included T.V. Arun Kumar, Veeresh V Appu, Dr. Vijay Kumar, Dr. K. Chittaiah, and several other academics, journalists, and community leaders. The event celebrated Malige's lifelong dedication to cultural research, philosophical study, and the preservation of Chitradurga's rich heritage.

DISTRICT SPORTS MILESTONE

Tumakuru set for first International Tennis event

TUMAKURU

Tumakuru is getting ready to host its first international women's tennis championship, bringing new excitement to sports in the district. The event will take place from May 3 to 10 at the Tumakuru Tennis Association Stadium. District In-charge Minister and Home Minister Dr. G. Parameshwar shared the news during a press meet.

This is the first global level sports event to be held in Tumkur after building courts of international standard.

More than 100 players from many countries are expected to join the tournament. The competition has been approved by the International Tennis Federation and will be part of the world ranking system. Winners will receive ranking points and prize money of up to 30,000 US dollars.

Officials said the new courts meet all required standards and will help local players gain experience at home. The minister said the event can inspire young players and bring more attention to sports in Karnataka. He also shared plans to hold the tournament every year and build more sports facilities in the region.

Speaking on safety, he said strong steps have been taken at Bengaluru's Chinnaswamy Stadium after last year's incident. Matches will continue with strict safety rules in place.

He also confirmed that the President will visit Tumakuru on April 1 for an event at Siddaganga Mutt. This visit is expected to bring more attention to the district and highlight its growing importance in sports and culture. Local residents have welcomed these developments and hope such events will create more opportunities for youth and improve facilities in the coming years. The district hopes to host bigger events in future years.

QUICK READ

Naxalite killed in Sukma encounter, search on

SUKMA

A Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district on Sunday, police said. The gunfight took place in a forest area under Polampalli police station limits during an anti-Naxal operation. Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan confirmed one Maoist was killed and a search operation is ongoing. The incident comes just two days before the Centre's March 31 deadline to eliminate Maoism. With this, 27 Maoists have been killed in the state this year.

Ice cream seller beheaded after argument in UP

BARABANKI

A 25-year-old ice-cream seller was brutally killed in Uttar Pradesh's Barabanki district following a dispute. The victim, identified as Bablu, had gone to Parsawal village for work when an argument broke out with 50-year-old Shankar Babu. Police said the accused attacked him with a sickle, beheaded him in public, and took the head home. He was later found cooking with the severed head nearby. The accused has been arrested, and the motive is still under investigation.

3 soldiers injured in Kupwara fratricidal firing

SRINAGAR

Three soldiers were injured in a fratricidal firing incident at an Army camp in the Trehgam area of Kupwara district, officials said on Sunday. A soldier allegedly opened fire on his colleagues before being overpowered. The injured are being treated at a military hospital. Officials say such incidents are often linked to stress, fatigue, and personal issues faced by troops in high-pressure environments. Factors like long deployments, isolation, family concerns, and mental health problems are seen as major causes.

Modi targets LDF-UDF over decades of corruption in Kerala

Modi expressed confidence in NDA victory, promising development, governance reforms, fund recovery, and better welfare delivery

PALAKKAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi accused the LDF and UDF of corruption, stating that people in Kerala are now looking for change.

Addressing a large election rally in Palakkad on Sunday, he strongly criticised both fronts, alleging that they have been involved in corruption and political opportunism for decades, which has held back the state's progress.

Modi pointed out that while the two parties appear to be rivals in Kerala, they often cooperate elsewhere, and warned voters to remain cautious. He said both sides mislead the public and claimed that support for the BJP is steadily increasing among youth, women, and farmers. According to him, this growing support reflects a clear "message of change" from the people of Kerala.

Expressing confidence, he said the BJP-led NDA would form the next government in the state. He assured that his government would focus on development and provide better governance if elected. Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleged that central funds meant for public welfare were misused by the ruling fronts in Kerala. He claimed that both the LDF and UDF are concerned about the BJP's growing presence in the state, as it could bring their alleged irregularities to light. Stressing development, Modi said that if the NDA comes to power, it will take firm steps to recover the misused funds and ensure they are properly utilised. He added that his government would focus on speeding up development, improving governance, and delivering the benefits of welfare schemes effectively to the people of Kerala.

Mamata hits back at BJP charge sheet

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday strongly criticised the BJP over its "charge sheet" against her government, asking the party to first present an account of its own actions at the Centre.

Addressing a rally in Manbazar, Purulia district, she responded to the charge sheet released by Union Home Minister Amit Shah a day earlier. Without naming him directly, Banerjee questioned the BJP over issues such as riots and governance, alleging that the party was more focused on political attacks than addressing public concerns.

She also accused the BJP of attempting to influence voter lists and termed the party a threat to democracy. Urging people not to support them, she said her government remains committed to the welfare of the state.

Reacting to remarks about her health, Banerjee rejected claims that she seeks sympathy before elections. She said she has faced serious injuries in the past and continued campaigning despite challenges. Referring to the 2021 Assembly elections, she alleged that her injury was not accidental and questioned the intent behind such comments.

Earlier, Amit Shah had released a 35-page charge sheet against the Trinamool Congress government, accusing it of failures in law and order, infiltration, and corruption. He described the upcoming elections as crucial for both the state and national security.

Banerjee, however, dismissed these allegations and urged voters to trust her leadership.

She told the public to consider her as the candidate in the elections and expressed confidence that the Trinamool Congress would return to power. She also appealed for peace and stability in the Jangalmahal region.

ANTF busts major inter-state drug racket

NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police Crime Branch's Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) has busted a well-organised inter-state drug network in Delhi-NCR, seizing psychotropic substances worth over Rs 4.5 crore.

Four accused have been arrested, while one juvenile has been apprehended.

The operation, based on specific intelligence inputs, led to the recovery of large quantities of Alprazolam and Tramadol tablets and capsules, indicating a widespread illegal trade.

A case has been registered under relevant sections of the NDPS Act.

The crackdown began on March 17 when police intercepted Nitin Pathak and a juvenile at Shiv Vihar Tiraha in northeast Delhi.

Authorities recovered 11,900 Alprazolam tablets and 825 Tramadol tablets from them, along with the motorcycle used for transport.

Further investigation led to a raid at a medical store in Bhopura, Uttar Pradesh, owned by Prem Singh Yadav, where additional Tramadol capsules were seized.

He was arrested on March 19. Police later arrested Shalu Kumar on March 21 and Sanjay Singh on March 23, recovering more illegal medicines from their possession.

Officials said the accused were involved in sourcing and distributing prescription drugs illegally across Delhi-NCR.

The investigation revealed that the main accused used his knowledge of pharmaceutical supply chains, while others operated through medical stores or illegal distribution networks.

In total, police seized 3.539 kg of Alprazolam worth around Rs 3.5 crore and 1.709 kg of Tramadol valued at about Rs 1 crore.

Authorities described the operation as a major success in tackling organised drug trafficking.

The Delhi Police has urged citizens to stay alert and report any information related to narcotics, assuring confidentiality for informants.

'No end to war in sight for Iran war'

NEW DELHI

A former diplomat has said there are no clear signs of when the ongoing Iran conflict will end. He stressed that the United States and Israel must take the lead in stopping the fighting to avoid further damage and rising global tensions.

Former diplomat K.P. Fabian on Sunday said the ongoing conflict involving Iran shows no clear signs of ending, calling it a "cycle of destruction" with uncertain outcomes. He pointed out that key decisions lie with Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, who must take steps to pause the war.

Fabian said the United States is sending mixed signals, sometimes claiming success while also facing rising fuel prices and economic concerns at home. He added that Iran's actions were a response to attacks, and any ceasefire would require both the US and Israel to stop military operations.

He also noted that growing protests in the US, including demonstrations against government policies and rising living costs, could influence political decisions. According to him, these pressures may push Trump to consider ending the conflict soon.

India remains stable amid global energy crisis

NEW DELHI

The ongoing tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran have shaken global energy markets, leading to shortages and rising fuel prices across many countries.

Even as the world struggles with a major energy crisis, India continues to remain stable, with no lockdowns, rationing, or major disruptions affecting daily life.

The ongoing tensions involving the United States, Israel, and Iran have shaken global energy markets, leading to shortages and rising fuel prices across many countries. Governments worldwide have been forced to take emergency steps to manage the crisis. The Gulf region, a key energy supplier, is also under pressure, worsening the situation.

Despite these challenges, India is in a relatively strong position. Fuel supplies like petrol, diesel, and piped natural gas remain steady for the country's large population. While there are some concerns about LPG availability in certain areas, these are mostly linked to panic buying rather than actual shortages.

In contrast, several countries are facing strict measures. Nations like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh have increased fuel prices, introduced work-from-home policies, and even shut educational institutions. Others, including Vietnam and the Philippines, have declared emergencies or reduced energy usage. Even developed countries such as Australia are facing fuel shortages and rising prices.

India, however, has managed to avoid such disruptions so far. Fuel prices remain unchanged, and the government says reserves are sufficient for over two months. Efforts are also being made to boost domestic production and promote alternatives like piped gas.

At home, political debates continue. Leaders like Mamata Banerjee, Rahul Gandhi, and Akhilesh Yadav have raised concerns over possible shortages and energy security.

However, the current situation on the ground remains largely normal, with fuel stations functioning and daily life continuing smoothly.

While challenges may arise if the global situation worsens, India's steady approach has helped maintain stability so far, offering relief to its citizens during a difficult global crisis.

24 BRS MLAs suspended from Telangana Assembly

HYDERABAD

Twenty-four MLAs of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) were suspended from the Telangana Assembly for two days on Sunday for disrupting House proceedings.

Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar announced the suspension after a resolution moved by Legislative Affairs Minister D. Sridhar Babu was passed by voice vote. The opposition BRS members had been protesting, demanding the formation of a House Committee to probe allegations of corruption and illegal mining against Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy. As the House convened, they raised slogans and entered the well, seeking to move an adjournment motion, which was rejected by the Speaker.

The ruling Congress opposed the demand, stating that a CB-CID inquiry into alleged illegal mining since 2014 was already underway, making a House Committee unnecessary. The issue led to heated exchanges between members of both parties.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy accused the BRS of deliberately stalling proceedings and called for their suspension. He also alleged that the opposition was trying to use the issue for political pressure and asked them to present any evidence before the investigating agency.

Despite repeated appeals by the Speaker to maintain order, the disruptions continued, leading to the suspension.

FEWER FLIGHTS APPROVED FOR SUMMER SCHEDULE AFTER CRISIS

NEW DELHI

Authorities have approved fewer flights for the summer schedule, taking a cautious approach after last year's major disruptions faced by IndiGo, sources said.

A senior source stated that the civil aviation ministry and regulator DGCA decided to be "more moderate" while approving flight schedules to avoid a repeat of the December 2025 crisis, when IndiGo faced large-scale operational issues leading to cancellations.

The summer schedule, effective from March 29 to October 24, has been planned after considering factors like aircraft availability, pilot strength, and operational readiness.

As per estimates, domestic airlines will operate about 10 per cent fewer flights compared to the same period last year.

During the 2025 summer schedule, airlines operated around 25,610 weekly flights. A 10 per cent cut means nearly 2,561 fewer services, bringing the total to about 23,049 weekly flights this year. The DGCA has released the schedule covering nine domestic airlines.

The source added that authorities prefer a balanced approach and may approve additional flights once airlines expand their fleet and have enough trained pilots. The decision also reflects concerns over maintaining reliability and avoiding disruptions.

Following the December crisis, the DGCA had already reduced IndiGo's winter schedule by 10 per cent. For the current summer schedule, IndiGo plans to begin with around 2,000 daily flights in April.

Industry officials earlier indicated uncertainty in operations due to evolving global conditions, especially the Middle East conflict that began on February 28.

Since the schedule was largely prepared before this development, airlines now face increased operational challenges, which may lead to further adjustments in the coming months.

Fish farmer elated after PM's Mann Ki Baat praise

SAMBALPUR : A fish farmer from Odisha expressed pride and gratitude after being praised by the Prime Minister on a national platform. Sujata Bhuyan, a fish farmer from Sambalpur, said she felt honoured and motivated after Prime Minister Narendra Modi mentioned her work during the 132nd episode of Mann Ki Baat. She described it as an emotional and proud moment for her and her family. Thanking the Prime Minister, Sujata said the recognition has encouraged her to work harder and grow further. During the programme, Modi praised fishermen as a key part of an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" and highlighted Sujata's journey as an example of determination and success. Sujata began her fish farming venture in 2022 after visiting the Hirakud Reservoir and learning about the activity.

GANGSTER NETWORK

Delhi cops arrest gang shooter, weapon seized

NEW DELHI

Delhi Police have arrested a shooter linked to an inter-state gangster network and recovered a loaded pistol from his hideout in the capital, officials said.

The accused, identified as Deepak alias Dilawar, is associated with the Rohit Godara-Goldy Brar-Virender Charan gang. A loaded semi-automatic pistol along with live cartridges was seized from his hideout in Sainik Vihar. A case under the Arms Act has been registered at the Special Cell police station.

Officials said the gang has been involved in multiple extortion cases across Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Punjab. In one instance in December 2025, gangster Virender Charan allegedly demanded Rs 10 crore from a Delhi-based jeweller.

During investigation, several accused were earlier arrested, including a key gangster wanted in multiple cases.

Based on their interrogation and intelligence inputs, police identified Deepak as one of the shooters involved in a firing incident at a travel company office in Punjab's Nakodar in January 2026.

Police teams tracked him across states before arresting him in Delhi on March 23. After his arrest, a pistol and five live cartridges were recovered at his instance.

During questioning, the accused revealed that he received the weapon and instructions from gang members through encrypted communication platforms. He also admitted his role in the firing incident.

Officials added that Deepak was planning to set up a base in Delhi, indicating the gang's intention to expand its operations in the national capital. Further investigation is ongoing.

QUICK READ

Domestic LPG supply stable, 55L refills delivered

NEW DELHI

The government on Sunday confirmed that domestic LPG supply remains normal, with over 55 lakh refills delivered on Saturday. Additionally, around 64,000 free-trade 5 kg cylinders were sold, and no shortages were reported at LPG distributorships. Online cylinder bookings have risen to 94 per cent on an industry basis. To prevent diversion at the distributor level, Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) based deliveries have increased from 53 per cent in February to 84 per cent, ensuring secure and timely distribution, the Ministry of Petroleum stated.

ECI transfers 83 BDOs/ AROs to ensure fair Bengal polls

KOLKATA

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Sunday removed 83 Block Development Officers (BDOs) who were serving as Assistant Returning Officers (AROs) across different districts of West Bengal, just 24 days ahead of the upcoming Assembly polls in the state. The two-phase elections for 294 Assembly constituencies will be held on April 23 and 29. The ECI has directed the state Chief Secretary to implement the transfer and posting of the 83 BDOs and AROs. The Commission took the step following a proposal by West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal, who sought the transfer and reposting of BDOs and AROs across districts in north and south Bengal. Notably, the highest number of transfers, 14 BDOs and AROs, were in East Midnapore district, followed by 11 in South 24 Parganas.

Fire breaks out at factory in UP's Ghaziabad

GHAZIABAD

A fire broke out at a factory near Lal Kuan in Ghaziabad on Sunday, officials said, but no casualties were reported. Chief Fire Officer Rahul Kumar stated that the Kotwali Fire Station received the alert at 13:47. The fire started in a unit producing plastic granules and had spread to a nearby factory. Firefighters brought the blaze under control within an hour. Fortunately, there were no injuries or loss of life, and the situation is now fully contained.

Shah slams Cong, lauds BJP Assam governance

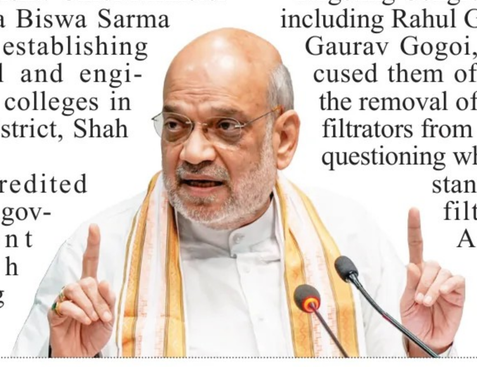
The Home Minister attacked the Congress, highlighting BJP's development, peace initiatives, and strong governance in Assam

GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday strongly criticised the Congress party during an election rally at Dhekiajuli, asserting that BJP governments at both the Centre and Assam have transformed the state with major investments, infrastructure development, and restored peace.

Shah pointed out that during 10 years of Congress-led central rule, Assam received around Rs 1.28 lakh crore. In contrast, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi from 2014 to 2024, the state received nearly Rs 9 lakh crore, demonstrating the Centre's focus on Assam's growth.

The Home Minister highlighted industrial and educational progress, mentioning a semiconductor plant being set up in Assam under the Modi government. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is also establishing medical and engineering colleges in every district, Shah said.



He credited the BJP government with bringing peace to the state, noting that during Congress rule, Assam faced frequent bomb blasts and violence. "Through multiple peace accords, nearly 10,000 youths have laid down arms, ensuring stability and growth," he added.

Targeting Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Gaurav Gogoi, Shah accused them of opposing the removal of illegal infiltrators from voter lists, questioning whether they stand with infiltrators or Assam's people.

Shah also referenced cultural and historical issues, noting that legendary singer Bhupen Hazarika received the Bharat Ratna only under Modi. He claimed Assam's first Chief Minister, Gopinath Bordoloi, was denied similar recognition earlier due to political bias.

Accusing Congress of neglecting Assam historically, Shah emphasised that the BJP government today protects every inch of India's territory. "Jawaharlal Nehru had said 'Tata bye-bye' to Assam during the China war. Under Modi, no one can snatch even an inch of India's land," he stated, underscoring national security and strong governance.

Centre approves 5 million new PNG connections

NEW DELHI

Following India's push for solar energy, the Centre is now prioritising Piped Natural Gas (PNG) connections as an alternative to LPG. Acting on Union Minister Pralhad Joshi's proposal, the government has approved 5 million new PNG connections to accelerate clean energy adoption.

The decision was taken during a roundtable meeting at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on expanding PNG services and ensuring effective management of essential commodities. The discussion included representatives from various states, urban local bodies, and central officials.

The Centre plans 5 million new PNG connections, prioritising schools and public institutions. States urged to expand networks, monitor supply, and prevent illegal hoarding, said Minister Pralhad Joshi

Minister Joshi emphasised the need to fast-track the transition from LPG to PNG, especially in areas with existing infrastructure. Priority will be given to schools, colleges, and public institutions to ensure structured adoption. States were urged to strengthen monitoring, expand PNG networks, and provide incentives for consumers switching from LPG.

Highlighting structural transition, Joshi stressed coordination among urban development departments, municipal bodies, and food and civil supply authorities to ensure a smooth, phased implementation. States and local bodies agreed to simplify approval procedures and appoint nodal officers to address challenges and support PNG rollout. CGD units and municipal commissioners will assist in expanding networks and solving operational issues.

The meeting also approved forming task forces and implementing action plans to expedite pending approvals and monitor network growth. Strict measures will be taken against illegal hoarding of essential commodities, including gas, with municipal commissioners instructed to track daily availability and prices.

Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri stressed strengthening PNG infrastructure for energy security, while Manohar Lal highlighted cities' economic role; officials and ministers attended both physically and virtually.

TMC leader arrested in South Dinajpur shooting case

KOLKATA

Four days after an attempted murder involving a Trinamool Congress worker, the Gangarampur Police in South Dinajpur district on Sunday arrested the prime accused, Babu Chowdhury, a local Trinamool leader. The firearm used in the incident has also been recovered. In total, six individuals have been arrested in connection with the case. Babu Chowdhury was produced before the Gangarampur Sub-Divisional Court.

The incident occurred on the night of March 24, when Babu Chowdhury, Town President of the Trinamool Congress's SC/ST/BC wing, and his associates allegedly shot fellow party worker Shiva Chowdhury right outside the Gangarampur Police Station. Earlier arrests had been made, but the main accused remained at large.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided a relative's house in Malda and apprehended Chowdhury. District Superintendent of Police Chinmoy Mittal briefed the media, confirming that Chowdhury, along with two accomplices, shot Shiva Chowdhury, who is now undergoing treatment at Gangarampur Super Speciality Hospital. CCTV footage of the incident has been obtained, and the weapon recovered.

The incident has sparked widespread political debate ahead of elections. Local BJP candidate Satyanarayan Roy criticised the Trinamool Congress for inaction, saying, "Even after such a grave incident, the party has not considered expelling Babu Chowdhury, whose criminal record seems to make him an asset for the party." Responding, Subhash Bhowal, District President of South Dinajpur Trinamool Congress, said, "There is no place for criminals in our party. We will review the facts and consult with leadership. If allegations are confirmed, appropriate action will be taken, and the law will take its course."

Vijay unveils 10-point youth plan for TN

CHENNAI

Actor-turned-politician Vijay on Sunday presented a detailed 10-point youth agenda, positioning it as a "guarantee" to transform opportunities for young people if Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) forms the next government in Tamil Nadu.

Speaking at a large event in Nungambakkam, Vijay described the proposals as a direct social contract with the state's youth.

"This is not just a promise, this is TVK's guarantee… your brother Vijay's guarantee," he said, highlighting a strong focus on employment, education, and governance reforms amid growing concerns over job scarcity.

A major highlight is the commitment to create a "drug-free Tamil Nadu". Vijay proposed stricter laws to curb narcotics, alongside community initiatives like anti-drug clubs in schools and colleges to promote awareness and prevention.

On education, the "Education Guarantee Scheme" will offer collateral-free loans up to Rs 20 lakh for higher studies, ensuring students are not forced to drop out due to financial constraints.

To address unemployment, Vijay proposed the Tamil Nadu Recruitment Accountability and Transparency Act, introducing a fixed annual calendar for government hiring, with all appointments completed within a year.

PEACE, DEVELOPMENT MAKE J&K A GLOBAL DESTINATION: LG

JAMMU

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday said that peace, prosperity, and enabling conditions have transformed the Union Territory into a destination for world-class events. Speaking at the felicitation ceremony of the Jammu Marathon at Maulana Azad Stadium, he called the marathon a symbol of the profound changes the region has experienced since 2019.

"Peace, prosperity, and enabling conditions have made Jammu and Kashmir capable of hosting international events. After seven decades, the Union Territory is now claiming its rightful place on the global stage," Sinha said.

The first-ever International Half Marathon in Jammu, organised by the J&K Tourism Department, included 21 km, 10 km, and 5 km race categories and saw participation from more than 3,000 runners from across India and abroad.

Calling the marathon a historic milestone, Sinha said Jammu has firmly established itself on the global running map.

He highlighted that the success of the event is expected to boost tourism, benefit trade and businesses, and contribute to overall development.

"I see the marathon as an event where runners focus on each step, not trophies or rankings. This principle mirrors Jammu and Kashmir's journey since 2019—progressing steadily, crafting a new identity," he added.

The L-G also noted that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, Jammu and Kashmir is showcasing its tourism potential and hosting international marathons, cricket tournaments, and other major events.

Sinha said the marathon showcases citizens' determination, sparking a new sporting revolution under Fit India.

6K PNG CONSUMERS GIVE UP LPG CONNECTIONS

NEW DELHI

Around 6,000 PNG consumers have voluntarily surrendered their LPG connections to make more cylinders available to households without piped natural gas, amid supply disruptions caused by the Iran war, a top Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry official said on Sunday.

Petroleum and Natural Gas Secretary Neeraj Mittal thanked these consumers for their initiative and encouraged others to follow suit. "A big thanks to them! Join this strong group of citizens giving up LPG to help those without PNG," he posted on X. Mittal also urged PNG consumers who still use LPG to give up their connections via http://MyPNGD.in.

Meanwhile, domestic LPG distribution continues smoothly. More than 54 lakh refills have been delivered as of Saturday, and there are no reports of shortages at distributorships. Online bookings accounted for 91 per cent of deliveries yesterday, according to the ministry.

To prevent diversion at the distributor level, Delivery Authentication Code (DAC)-based deliveries have been increased from 53 per cent in February 2026 to 84 per cent now. Refineries are operating at high capacity, maintaining adequate crude inventories, and domestic LPG production has been boosted to meet consumption needs.

The government ensures 100% supply of PNG to households and CNG transport, while industrial and commercial users get 80%. Fuel outlets operate normally, with excise duty on petrol and diesel cut by Rs 10 per litre.

CHANGING LIVES

Solar power lights up remote Tripura villages

AGARTALA

The impact of solar energy in remote tribal areas of Tripura has earned national recognition, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighting the state's achievements in his monthly radio programme, 'Mann Ki Baat', on Sunday.

Speaking about the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana (PMSGMBY), the Prime Minister noted that solar mini-grids are now providing reliable electricity to previously underserved tribal communities in the Northeast, improving their daily lives.

Tripura Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath, who also handles the Agriculture portfolio, shared the programme's highlights with local residents in his Mohanpur Assembly constituency. He emphasised that solar microgrids are bringing hope to remote areas, with Karnaram Para in Khowai district serving as a model for change.

Under PMSGMBY, 12,103 families across 347 remote localities now receive free electricity, while 2,753 households have rooftop solar panels. Solar power is also supporting agriculture, with 7,991 farming families using solar-powered irrigation pumps to irrigate nearly 40,000 kani of land.

Other initiatives such as PM DevINE (Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region) and PM-JANMAN (Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan) have extended electricity to 9,725 homes and assisted 1,703 families across 30 localities, further enhancing access to power and improving livelihoods.

Minister Nath noted that solar energy is not just about lighting homes but also transforming aspirations, education, and economic activity in tribal regions.

Expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Modi for recognising Tripura's progress, he called the development a milestone in the state's journey toward sustainable growth and self-reliance.

"From darkness to light, this transformation is more than electrification — it is a new beginning," Minister Nath said, highlighting Tripura's steady path toward a brighter, solar-powered future.

Kerala CM Vijayan rejects SDPI support allegations

MALAPPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday firmly asserted that the Left Democratic Front (LDF) maintains a consistent stance against all forms of communalism, rejecting allegations that it has any association with communal forces or parties like the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI).

Speaking to reporters in Malappuram, Vijayan responded to repeated questions about SDPI potentially extending support to the Left, stating that such claims should be directed to those making them, and emphasised that the LDF has no role in such speculation.

Visibly annoyed at the persistence of the questions, the Chief Minister accused certain media sections of attempting to push a pre-decided agenda. "You have come here with a pre-decided agenda. Please set that aside. Are you trying to derail this press conference?" he asked.

Vijayan added that such concerns were being raised across different platforms and advised reporters to seek clarification directly from the groups concerned.

When asked if the CPI-M would accept votes from SDPI, he did not answer directly but reiterated that the Left has no ties with any communal organisation, whether representing majority or minority interests.

"Communalism exists among both majority and minority groups in India, and we oppose all forms equally," Vijayan said, rejecting claims linking LDF with communal forces.

Emphasising the Left's long-standing ideology, he noted there has been no change in its stance over decades. Criticising the opposition, Vijayan questioned whether the Congress-led UDF maintains a similar position and accused media of portraying UDF as free from communal bias while unfairly targeting LDF, leaving it to the public to judge these narratives.

QUICK READ

Magnitude 4.3 earthquake hits Tibet

Tibet

An earthquake measuring 4.3 on the Richter scale struck Tibet on Sunday, according to the National Center for Seismology. The tremor occurred at a depth of 145 km. Officials said the region also experienced a smaller 3.2 magnitude quake on March 27. Tibet lies in a seismically active zone due to the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates. This ongoing movement frequently triggers earthquakes and contributes to the formation and elevation of the Himalayan region.

'No Kings' protests sweep US cities

New York

Thousands gathered across the United States for "No Kings" rallies opposing policies of President Donald Trump. Protesters marched through Times Square and other cities, chanting slogans, singing, and holding placards. Major demonstrations took place in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. In St Paul, Bruce Springsteen performed at a key rally. Despite minor tensions in West Palm Beach, most protests remained peaceful, reflecting widespread public dissent.

Disappearances, killings raise Baloch concerns

Balochistan

Reports of enforced disappearances and alleged extrajudicial killings in Balochistan have sparked concern. A missing teenager's body was recovered in Turbat with gunshot wounds. Separate incidents in Surab and Panjgur reportedly left three others dead. The Baloch Yakjehti Committee alleged involvement of security forces and urged global attention. Families have staged protests demanding justice, while authorities have not issued an official response.

Nepal's ex-PM Oli, HM Lekhak produced in court

Both leaders were arrested on Saturday in connection with a culpable homicide case related to the Sep 2025 Gen-Z protests

KATHMANDU

Former Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is scheduled to appear before a court virtually on Sunday due to health concerns, while former Home Minister Ramesh Lehak has been produced in court in person.

A team from the government attorney's office has been assigned to facilitate Oli's virtual appearance. Both leaders were arrested on Saturday in connection with a culpable homicide case related to the September 2025 Gen-Z protests. Oli was taken into custody from his residence in Bhaktapur.

Following the arrest, cadres of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) took to the streets in protest, burning tyres and raising slogans demanding his immediate release. Demonstrators also set fire to a report prepared by a high-level investigation commission that examined the violent protests.

The unrest had resulted in the deaths of 77 people and caused widespread damage to public and private property.

The current government, led by Balen Shah, recently decided to implement the recommendations of the investigation panel, which paved the way for legal action against those named in the report. In response, the party has announced nationwide protests and indicated that it will pursue both legal and political measures to challenge Oli's arrest.

Former Nepal Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and former Home Minister Ramesh Lehak were produced before the Kathmandu District Court on Sunday over alleged atrocities during the 2025 Gen-Z protests. Oli, currently hospitalised, appeared virtually, while Lekhak was presented in person.

Both were arrested on Saturday in connection with the September 8–9 protests that left 77 people dead and over 2,400 injured. A probe panel led by Gauri Bahadur Karki held them responsible and recommended action. The government led by Balen Shah has begun implementing the report, with police initiating further proceedings.

IDF strikes Iranian military sites in Tehran

TEL AVIV

IDF strikes targeting Iranian terror regime infrastructure sites
Iranian terror regime command center
Weapon production site
Iranian terror regime temporary command center

The Israel Defence Forces said it carried out large-scale airstrikes targeting key Iranian military infrastructure in central Tehran, hitting weapons facilities and command centres

The Israel Defence Forces said its latest operation targeted several locations connected to Iran's military network, including weapons storage depots and production facilities.

According to the military, a number of temporary command centres were also destroyed, along with sites where senior commanders were believed to be operating. The strikes additionally hit ballistic missile production and storage units, air defence systems, and key observation posts, as part of a coordinated and large-scale attack.

The development comes at a time of heightened tensions between Israel and Iran, with both nations continuing to exchange sharp statements and accusations amid the ongoing conflict.

In response, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps issued a strong warning, stating that universities associated with the United States and Israel in the West Asian region could be viewed as potential targets. The group accused US and Israeli forces of repeatedly attacking Iranian academic institutions, specifically mentioning the University of Science and Technology in Tehran.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei strongly criticised the strikes, claiming they were part of a deliberate effort to undermine the country's scientific capabilities and cultural heritage. He alleged that universities, research facilities, historical landmarks, and even prominent scientists had been systematically targeted over the past month.

Tehran also dismissed claims made by the United States and Israel that the strikes were aimed at countering Iran's nuclear programme or addressing an imminent threat. Iranian officials described these justifications as misleading, arguing that the broader objective of the campaign is to weaken the nation's intellectual, cultural, and institutional foundations.

India-Malta deepen ties across key sectors

VALLETTA

India and Malta held discussions to expand cooperation across key sectors such as technology, healthcare, renewable energy, and trade, further strengthening their long-standing partnership.

The two countries conducted the fourth round of Foreign Office Consultations in Valletta, where they reviewed the progress of their bilateral relations. Both sides agreed to deepen collaboration in areas including information and communications technology, pharmaceuticals, education, and other emerging sectors.

During the talks, officials also explored ways to enhance economic and commercial engagement, particularly in light of the recently concluded India–European Union Free Trade Agreement. They exchanged views on regional and global developments and reiterated their commitment to working together in multilateral platforms.

The meeting was co-chaired by Sibi George, Secretary (West) in India's Ministry of External Affairs, and Christopher Cutajar, Permanent Secretary at Malta's Foreign Ministry. As part of his visit, George met Ian Borg, Malta's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, to discuss expanding cooperation and exploring new areas of engagement.

He also held discussions with Brigadier Clinton J O'Neill on strengthening defence and security ties. In addition, George interacted with business leaders in Malta to promote trade, investment, and business partnerships between the two nations.

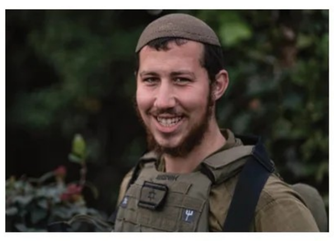
India and Malta share warm and friendly relations. India was among the first countries to recognise Malta's independence in 1964, and both nations, as members of the Commonwealth, continue to deepen their cooperation across various fields.

Netanyahu mourns soldier killed in Lebanon fighting

TEL AVIV

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday expressed condolences over the death of an Israeli soldier killed during fighting in Lebanon, as tensions continue along the border.

The Israel Defence Forces confirmed that Sergeant Moshe Yitzhak HaCohen Katz, 22, was killed during an attack. Born in the United States, Katz had moved to Israel and served in the Paratroopers Brigade. Netanyahu praised his bravery



and extended support to his family, while also wishing a speedy recovery to three soldiers injured in the same incident.

The military said the wounded soldiers were evacuated for treatment and their families were informed. Reports indicate that at least five Israeli soldiers have been killed in Lebanon since the launch of Operation Roaring Lion in late February.

Meanwhile, the Hezbollah claimed responsibility for multiple attacks targeting Israeli positions near Safed. The group said it launched missile strikes on military bases and carried out drone attacks, along with rocket fire aimed at Israeli troops and vehicles in northern Israel. It also reported targeting an Israeli armoured unit in southern Lebanon.

Earlier, the Israeli military said it had uncovered weapons belonging to Hezbollah in civilian areas of southern Lebanon, including a cache found inside a school in Al-Khiyam near the border. The discovery included anti-tank weapons, mortars, grenades, and explosives.

The ongoing exchanges highlight rising cross-border hostilities and the fragile security situation in the region, with both sides continuing military actions and counterattacks.

Sindh law fails to protect rural women workers

SINDH

A law introduced in 2019 to safeguard women agricultural workers in Sindh remains largely unimplemented, leaving millions without access to basic rights and protections promised under the legislation.

During a seminar held in Mirpurkhas by the Hari Welfare Association, speakers raised concerns over the continued neglect of rural women labourers. Activists noted that around 15 million women engaged in agriculture, livestock, and fisheries still lack legal recognition and essential safeguards.

HWA President Akram Ali Khaskheli highlighted that despite their significant contribution to the rural economy, these women are de-

prived of fair wages, healthcare, and educational opportunities. Most workers earn between PKR 500 and 700 per day and often work long hours in difficult and unsafe environments.

Women are actively involved in physically demanding tasks such as cotton picking, chilli harvesting, date processing, banana farming, and wheat cultivation. However, their efforts continue to be undervalued and largely overlooked.

The Sindh Women Agriculture Workers Act, 2019 guarantees several rights, including formal employment contracts, equal pay, paid maternity and sick leave, and the right to unionise. It also includes provisions to protect women from workplace harassment, abuse, and gender discrimination. Despite these measures, speakers at the seminar said the law has not been effectively enforced and remains largely limited to paper.

Sumera Baloch stated that the government is taking steps to empower women, but activists argue that there has been little real improvement at the ground level so far.

Afghan forces destroy heroin labs, seize drugs

KABUL

Afghan security forces have destroyed two illegal heroin processing labs and seized over 6,000 kg of drugs in western Afghanistan, officials said.

According to the Ministry of Interior Affairs, counter-narcotics teams carried out targeted operations in Ghor province, dismantling the facilities and confiscating around 6,140 kg of precursor chemicals used in heroin production. The authorities said the crackdown is part of a wider effort to eliminate drug manufacturing and trafficking across the country.

Officials stated that operations against illegal drugs have been intensified nationwide, with a strong focus on ending poppy cultivation and heroin production. The government has pledged to continue strict action until drug networks are fully dismantled.

In recent weeks, similar operations have been conducted in other regions. In Takhar province, police arrested two smugglers and seized 41 kg of illegal drugs, including opium and hashish. Another operation in Farah province led to the arrest of two suspects and the recovery of 75 kg of raw opium along with a weapon.

SU DO KU

Brain-Bender: Can You Solve It?

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3			5			8		
	7			8			4	9
4		5	2		7	9		
	2			9			1	5
7		3	8		1	2		
	5			4			2	3
2		7	9		5	4		
	4			3			9	7

5	6	3	2	1	8	7	4	9
1	4	9	9	3	7	8	5	2
7	8	2	4	5	9	6	3	1
3	9	7	1	4	5	2	8	6
4	2	1	6	8	7	3	9	5
8	5	6	9	3	2	1	7	4
9	1	8	7	2	4	5	6	3
2	7	4	5	6	3	9	1	8
6	3	5	8	9	1	4	2	7

Solutions to Yesterday's puzzle

Fill a 9×9 grid with numbers so that each row, column and 3×3 section contain all of the digits between 1 and 9.

1 killed, several hurt in Afghan road accident

KABUL

A road accident in eastern Afghanistan left one person dead and 10 others injured after a mini-bus collided with two vehicles, raising concerns over road safety in the region.

The incident occurred in Laghman province, where a mini-bus crashed into a three-wheeler and a motorbike in the provincial capital Mehtarlam on Saturday. Police officials said the accident was caused by careless driving. One person died on the spot, while 10 others, including five children and two women, sustained injuries.

All the injured were taken to nearby hospitals for medical treatment. Authorities have urged drivers to strictly follow traffic rules and maintain caution to prevent such incidents in the future.

Similar accidents have been reported in different parts of the country in recent weeks. Earlier, a collision between two speeding vehicles in Jawzjan province resulted in three deaths and six injuries. Another crash in Baghlan province claimed three lives, while a separate accident in Badakhshan province led to two deaths after a vehicle veered off a mountainous road and fell into a ravine.

Road accidents continue to be a major issue in Afghanistan, largely due to poor road infrastructure, reckless driving, and lack of proper safety measures. The country's difficult terrain, particularly in mountainous regions, further increases the risk of such fatal incidents.

DRUG PRICE RISE

Medicine prices soar in Rawalpindi markets

ISLAMABAD

Prices of medicines in Rawalpindi have surged sharply, rising between 50 per cent and 500 per cent in local markets, raising serious concerns among patients and healthcare providers.

According to reports, the increase has impacted a wide range of essential medicines, including those used to treat diabetes, hypertension, infections, and gastrointestinal conditions.

The cost of an insulin injection device has almost doubled, climbing from PKR 2,200 to PKR 4,720. Prices of vitamin B supplements, indigestion treatments, and nutritional tablets have also gone up. In addition, thyroid medication has seen a steep rise, while drugs used for typhoid and other critical illnesses have become significantly more expensive.

Residents and critics have described the situation as "unbearable," particularly for low-income groups who are finding it increasingly difficult to afford necessary treatments. Many have called on authorities to take urgent steps to regulate prices and ensure the availability of essential medicines at reasonable rates.

At the same time, the cost of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) has also increased across Pakistan, with cylinder prices rising considerably. This has added to the financial strain on households, while also pushing up transportation costs, as many public and private vehicles rely on LPG.

Officials attribute the LPG price rise to global supply challenges and reduced imports from Iran during the festive season. Experts point out that Pakistan depends heavily on imported LPG to meet its yearly demand, making it highly sensitive to fluctuations in international supply and pricing trends.

QUICK READ

'India well-prepared to handle global disruptions'

New Delhi

At a time when geopolitical tensions in West Asia have raised concerns globally, India's supply chain ecosystem continues to remain robust, stable, and well-prepared under the decisive leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) said on Sunday. CAIT Secretary General and Delhi MP Praveen Khandelwal said that the Government has already clarified that there are adequate stocks of essential commodities across the country, and there is no cause for concern regarding availability or distribution of goods. The proactive monitoring mechanisms and strong coordination between central and state agencies have ensured that supply chains remain uninterrupted, Khandelwal said.

Coal India bags Rs 1,057 cr battery storage project in Telangana

New Delhi

Coal India Limited (CIL) on Sunday announced that it has received a Letter of Award (LoA) for setting up a large battery energy storage project in Telangana, marking a further step in its clean energy expansion. The order has been awarded by Telangana Power Generation Corporation Limited for developing a 750 MWh battery energy storage system (BESS) at Choutuppal. The project, which will have a capacity of 187.5 MW for four hours, is estimated to cost Rs 1,057.09 crore. Coal India Limited has received a Letter of Award (LOA) from Telangana Power Generation Corporation Limited for Setting up of 750 MWh (187.5 MW for 4 hours) BESS Plant at Choutuppal, it said in its regulatory filing.

6,000 PNG consumers give up LPG connections to help others

New Delhi

As many as 6,000 PNG consumers have now surrendered their LPG connections in order to make more LPG available to those who do not have access to piped natural gas amid the disruption in supplies due to the Iran war, a top Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry official said on Sunday. As many as 6000 PNG consumers surrendered their LPG till yesterday. A big thanks to them! Join this strong bold group of Do-Good citizens who have come forward to give up LPG to help those to get LPG who don't have PNG, Petroleum and Natural Gas Secretary Neeraj Mittal said in a post on X.

Koo warns $120–130 oil would trigger crisis level 3

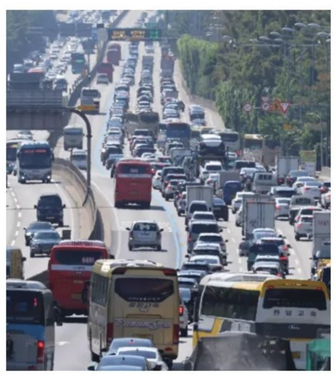
The govt has signalled that stricter energy-saving measures, including expanding a mandatory 5-day vehicle rotation system to private sector, could be implemented if global oil prices continue to rise amid Middle East tensions.

SEOUL

Finance Minister Koo Yun-cheol on Sunday said authorities are closely monitoring global oil market trends and may take additional steps if prices reach between $120 and $130 per barrel.

Speaking during a televised interview, he warned that such a surge could force the government to elevate its national resource crisis alert to Level 3, triggering broader restrictions and stronger public cooperation measures.

Currently, the country is operating under a Level 2 alert in its four-tier national resource security crisis system. This status was raised



last week due to concerns over potential disruptions in crude oil supplies caused by ongoing geopolitical instability in the Middle East. The government believes that further escalation in the region could significantly impact global energy markets, leading to higher fuel costs and economic strain.

As part of existing measures, a mandatory five-day vehicle rotation system has already been implemented for the public sector. Under this rule, vehicles are restricted from operating one day out of every five working days, based on the last digit of their license plate numbers. While the private sector has so far been encouraged to participate voluntarily, officials are now considering making compliance compulsory if the crisis deepens.

Koo emphasized that the government's priority is to minimize the economic impact of rising oil prices while ensuring energy conservation nationwide. In addition to potential mobility restrictions, authorities are preparing a supplementary budget worth 25 trillion won, equivalent to approximately $16.6 billion. This financial package aims to support small and medium-sized enterprises, which are particularly vulnerable to fuel price fluctuations, as well as households facing increased living costs.

The government's approach reflects a broader effort to balance economic stability with resource management, as uncertainties in the global energy landscape continue to grow.

IndiGo expands network with 30 new routes from Navi Mumbai

MUMBAI

The airline stated on Sunday that the new routes will be introduced between March 29 and April 23, connecting Navi Mumbai to several key cities, including Agra, Ayodhya, Bagdogra, Belgaum, Chandigarh, Diu, Kannur, Kolkata, Patna, Rajkot, Srinagar, Varanasi, and Visakhapatnam, among others.

With this expansion, IndiGo will operate over 400 weekly departures from the airport, enhancing travel convenience and strengthening regional connectivity.

The Navi Mumbai International Airport, developed and operated by Adani Airports Holdings Limited, is considered one of India's largest greenfield airport projects and has been completed in record time. The addition of multiple routes is expected to further position the airport as a major aviation hub in the country.

In a parallel development, IndiGo has also commenced twice-daily direct flights between Bhavnagar and Navi Mumbai from Sunday. This new service aims to improve connectivity within Gujarat and provide passengers with reliable and efficient travel options. The flights on this route are being operated using IndiGo's ATR aircraft, known for their suitability on regional routes.

Earlier this month, the airline also announced the launch of direct flights to Jamnagar starting April 23, 2026. With these additions,

The initiative will significantly boost domestic connectivity and offering travelers expanded options across India

IndiGo will now operate flights to six cities in Gujarat; Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, and Jamnagar offering more than 1,400 weekly services to and from the state, which is a key industrial and economic hub.

Additionally, IndiGo recently entered into a strategic partnership with Adani Airport Holdings Limited to enhance customer experience. Under this collaboration, members of IndiGo's BluChip loyalty program can earn reward points on duty-free shopping across airports managed by the Adani group. Travellers can pre-book duty-free items online, earn five BluChips for every Rs 100 spent, and conveniently collect their purchases at the airport.

The airline's latest expansion reflects its continued focus on increasing connectivity, improving customer convenience, and strengthening its presence across India's growing aviation sector.

NSE to launch Brent Crude futures from April after Sebi nod

MUMBAI

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) is set to launch a new crude oil futures contract linked to global benchmark prices from April 13, in a move aimed at strengthening India's commodity derivatives market.

The exchange said it will introduce Dated Brent Crude Oil (Platts) futures in its commodity derivatives segment after receiving approval from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

The new contract will be based on the S&P Global Energy (Platts) Dated Brent assessment, which is widely used across the world as a benchmark to track physical crude oil prices.

It will be traded under the symbol BRCRUDEOIL, with contracts available on a monthly basis. Trading in these futures will take place from Monday to Friday between 9:00 am and 11:30 pm or 11:55 pm, depending on US daylight saving time.

The contracts will be cash-settled, meaning traders will not have to deal with the physical delivery of crude oil.

The final settlement price will be calculated using the monthly average of Platts Dated Brent prices. This value will then be converted into Indian rupees using the reference exchange rate published by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

NSE said the contract will follow quality standards defined by S&P Global Energy (Platts), ensuring alignment with global market practices. With this launch, the exchange aims to fill a long-standing gap for Indian traders and companies who want exposure to global crude oil prices.

RBI mandates 2-factor authentication for digital payments

NEW DELHI

Digital payments in India will become more secure starting April 1, 2026, as the Reserve Bank of India introduces stricter authentication rules, making transactions safer but slightly more time-consuming.

Under the new guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India, two-factor authentication will be mandatory for all online transactions, including payments made through UPI, debit and credit cards, and mobile wallets. This marks a significant shift from the current system, where one-time passwords are often sufficient to complete transactions.

With the revised framework, users will be required to undergo at least two layers of verification. In addition to OTP, this could include a PIN, password, biometric authentication, or a secure token. The move is aimed at addressing growing concerns over digital fraud, particularly phishing attacks and SIM swap scams, where OTP-based systems have been ex-

ploited by cybercriminals.

The central bank's decision comes in response to the rising number of unauthorised transactions reported across the country. By introducing an additional security layer, the regulator aims to enhance user trust and safeguard financial data in an increasingly digital economy.

For consumers, the changes may result in slightly longer transaction times, especially when using new devices or conducting high-value payments. However, officials have indicated that routine transactions on trusted devices will remain relatively seamless, ensuring convenience is not significantly compromised.

A notable feature of the new system is its risk-based approach. The level of authentication required will vary depending on the nature, value, and behavioural patterns associated with each transaction. This adaptive mechanism is designed to strike a balance between security and user experience.

In addition, the new rules place greater accountability on banks and payment service providers. In cases where fraud occurs due to lapses in their systems, financial institutions may be required to compensate affected customers. This provision is expected to improve grievance redressal and encourage stronger cybersecurity measures across the sector.

The Reserve Bank of India has also indicated that similar authentication requirements will be extended to international transactions, including cross-border card payments. Full implementation of these norms is scheduled by October 2026, marking a major step forward in strengthening India's digital payment ecosystem.

Oil prices, geopolitics to drive Indian stock market next week

MUMBAI

The Indian stock market ended the week on a weak note, extending its losing streak for the fifth straight week, as rising crude oil prices, a falling rupee and escalating tensions in the Middle East dampened investor sentiment. These global factors are now expected to remain the key triggers for market movement in the coming week.

Both benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty saw sharp declines of over 2 per cent each. The Sensex plunged 1,690 points, or 2.25 per cent, to close at 73,583, while the Nifty dropped 487 points, or 2.09 per cent, to settle at 22,819.60.

Commenting on Nifty technical outlook, experts said that a decisive breakdown below the 22,700–22,500 range can accelerate selling pressure, potentially dragging the index towards the 22,000–21,744 zone, which aligns with the 52-week low region.

On the upside, 23,000–23,100 now acts as immediate resistance, followed by a stronger supply zone in the 23,300–23,500 range, an analyst mentioned.

The broader markets also remained under pressure, with midcap and smallcap indices ending lower. The ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East have emerged as a major concern for global markets.

Uncertainty around possible negotiations between the United States and Iran continues to keep investors on edge. Rising crude oil prices are further weighing on sentiment. Brent crude has surged above $112 per barrel, marking a sharp rally since the conflict began.

Higher oil prices are a concern for India, which depends heavily on imports, as they can fuel inflation and widen the trade deficit. The Indian rupee has also been under pressure, slipping past the 94 mark against the US dollar.

Sanand emerges as semiconductor hub with new OSAT facility

SANAND

The upcoming facility, being developed at an investment of Rs 3,300 crore, marks a significant milestone in India's push to strengthen its semiconductor ecosystem.

Approved by the Union Cabinet on September 23, 2024, under the National Semiconductor Mission, the plant will be located in the industrial area of Sanand in Gujarat.

The OSAT facility will focus on testing and packaging semiconductor chips before they are released into the market, completing a crucial stage in the chip manufacturing value chain. Once operational, the plant is expected to handle a production capacity of nearly 60 lakh chips per day, significantly boosting India's domestic capabilities in semiconductor processing.

This development follows the recent inauguration of a semiconductor unit by Micron Technology on February 28, highlighting the rapid emergence of Sanand as a focal point for semiconductor investments. In addition to Kaynes Semicon and Micron, another semiconductor unit is currently being developed by CG Semi, further consolidating the region's position in the sector.

The Gujarat government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, has been actively promoting the state as a preferred destination for semiconductor manufacturing and advanced technology industries. Policy support, infrastructure development, and investor-friendly initiatives have played a key role in attracting major projects to the region.

Officials noted that the addition of the OSAT facility will not only strengthen the semiconductor ecosystem but also generate employment opportunities and stimulate economic growth. The clustering of multiple semiconductor projects in Sanand is expected to create synergies across the supply chain, positioning India as a competitive player in the global semiconductor landscape.

With increasing investments and strategic initiatives, Sanand is steadily evolving from an automobile manufacturing centre into a critical hub for next-generation electronics and semiconductor production.

Big financial changes from April 1

MUMBAI

A series of major financial and regulatory changes will come into effect across India from April 1, marking the start of the new financial year and bringing significant impact on taxpayers, employees and daily commuters. Among the most notable developments is the rollout of the new Income Tax Act, 2025, which will replace the decades-old Income Tax Act 1961.

The new law aims to simplify the tax framework by introducing clearer language and removing complex terminology. One key change is the replacement of terms like 'Assessment Year' and 'Previous Year' with a single concept called 'Tax Year', making compliance easier for taxpayers.

The changes will also extend to income tax return filing norms and PAN-related rules, with stricter regulations expected to improve transparency and plug loopholes in the system.

At the same time, labour law reforms are likely to be implemented, which could directly impact employees' salaries and retirement benefits. The proposed changes aim to restructure wage definitions, increasing the share of basic pay and dearness allowance.

This is expected to boost gratuity payouts and other benefits, although it may also alter the in-hand salary for many workers. In the transport sector, the Indian Railways has revised its ticket cancellation policy. From April 1, passengers cancelling tickets within eight hours of departure may not be eligible for any refund.

GOVT-INDUSTRY CO-OP

CII lauds Centre's response to West Asia crisis

NEW DELHI

Apex business chamber CII on Sunday lauded the swift action taken by the Government of India for a coordinated and well-calibrated response to the disruptions arising from the West Asia crisis, and called on industry to complement these efforts through responsible and constructive action.

CII observed that the present situation represents a supply-side disruption, with pressures transmitted through energy costs, logistics and working capital cycles. While the policy response has mitigated immediate risks, the evolving situation requires continued coordination between the government and industry.

CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said, the government's response has been timely, measured and reassuring. It reflects a whole-of-government approach that has focused on keeping supply chains functional, supporting exporters, protecting households from the rise in global oil prices and maintaining macroeconomic stability. Industry deeply appreciates both the intent and the execution.

These measures have helped contain inflationary pressures, sustain industrial activity and preserve confidence at a time of global uncertainty, while also supporting jobs and livelihoods across sectors, he added.

CII has outlined a 12-point action plan that the industry may consider in the current context. One, the industry may work with the government in building strategic reserves and buffer mechanisms for critical raw materials, fuels and intermediate goods. Collaborative approaches to stockholding, shared infrastructure and improved data visibility can significantly strengthen national preparedness against future disruptions.

Two, companies may endeavour to maintain price stability by ensuring that the benefits of stable fuel prices and moderated logistics costs are transmitted to end consumers and downstream partners. This will support inflation management and reinforce industry credibility.

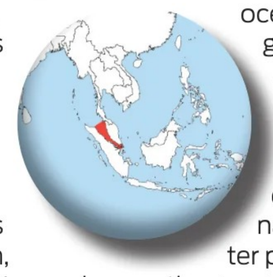
Three, companies may strengthen supply chain resilience by identifying alternative sourcing corridors, diversifying vendor bases and building calibrated inventory buffers for critical inputs. This will reduce exposure to disruptions arising from concentrated maritime routes.

Fourth, firms may accelerate investments in energy transition, including renewables, green hydrogen and industrial energy efficiency. The current situation reinforces the need to reduce dependence on conventional fuels and build long-term energy resilience.

The Arteries of the World Economy: PLACES THROUGH WHICH MOST GLOBAL TRADE FLOWS

IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS· WORLD TRADE GEOGRAPHY

80% of world trade by volume moves by sea, $14T in goods traverse key chokepoints annually, 9 critical points where disruption reshapes world markets. Imagine the global economy as a living body. Factories, farms, and mines are its organs. Roads and railways are capillaries. But the world's oceans, and the narrow passages connecting them, are its great arteries and like arteries, a blockage anywhere can cause catastrophic disruption everywhere. The grounding of the Ever Given in the Suez Canal in March 2021 offered the world a vivid and expensive reminder of just how dependent modern supply chains are on a remarkably small number of geographic pinch-points. Roughly 80 percent of global trade by volume and over 70 percent by value moves by sea.



Yet the world's vast oceans are navigated through a surprisingly limited number of chokepoints: narrow straits, engineered canals, and deep-water port cities where the geography of the planet funnels commerce into concentrated corridors. To understand where trade flows, you must understand these places their histories, their vulnerabilities, and the extraordinary volumes of goods they handle every single day.

The Strait of Malacca: ASIA'S COMMERCIAL JUGULAR

Approximately 100,000 vessels pass through every year, carrying roughly one-quarter of all goods traded globally, including around 16 million barrels of oil per day. Japan, China, South Korea, and Taiwan together responsible for a massive share of global manufacturing depend on this strait for almost all their Middle Eastern oil.

If the Malacca Strait were blocked, alternative routes around Australia or Lombok would add weeks and thousands of miles to each voyage, dramatically inflating shipping costs worldwide.

The Strait of Malacca has been the Indo-Pacific's commercial spine for over two thousand years.

Arab, Indian, Chinese, and eventually European traders all converged here because the geography of Southeast Asia simply left no practical alternative. Even today, with all the technology of the 21st century, the narrowest part of the strait the Philip Channel, just 2.8 kilometres wide is navigated by supertankers and container vessels daily in a choreography of extraordinary precision.

Singapore sits at the strait's southern end and has built its entire economic identity around this position.

The city-state is the world's second-busiest port by tonnage and the globe's leading transshipment hub, a place where cargo is unloaded, sorted, and reloaded onto other vessels bound for dozens of onward destinations.

Its success is a testament to how controlling a geographic chokepoint, and serving it superbly, can transform a small island with almost no natural resources into one of the wealthiest nations on earth.

The Suez Canal; Europe's Lifeline to Asia

Around 12–15% of global trade passes through the Suez Canal annually, including roughly 30% of global container traffic.

More than 50 ships transit the canal each day. Without it, vessels traveling between Asia and Europe would face an additional 7,000 miles around the Cape of Good Hope adding two to three weeks to every journey and massively increasing fuel costs.

Egypt collects over $9 billion annually in canal tolls, making it one of the country's top three sources of foreign currency.

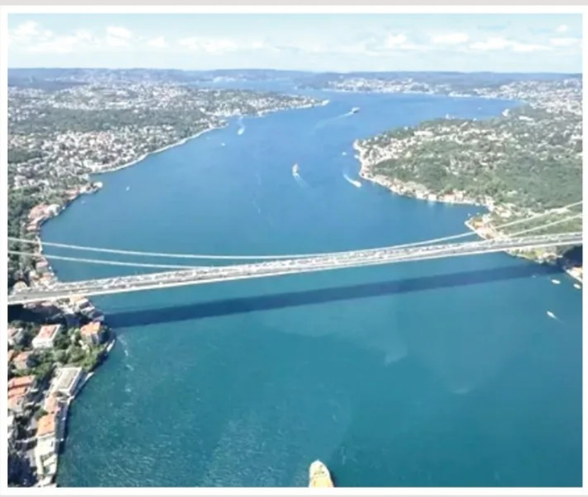
When Ferdinand de Lesseps's engineers completed the Suez Canal in 1869, they fundamentally rewired world commerce.

The ancient overland Silk Road had always struggled to move bulk goods efficiently; the canal created a sea highway that allowed modern industrial economies to exchange raw materials and manufactured products at previously unimaginable scale and speed.

Its nationalization by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1956 triggered an international crisis a measure of how vital the passage had become in just nine decades of operation.

The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping that began in late 2023 demonstrated once again how geopolitical instability in the region surrounding a chokepoint can ripple instantly through global supply chains.

Dozens of major shipping lines temporarily rerouted around Africa, adding weeks and significant cost to trade between Asia and Europe, and causing delays that spread through manufacturing networks worldwide.



The Strait of Hormuz; The Oil World's Pinch-Point

Approximately 20–21 million barrels of oil pass through the Strait of Hormuz every single day — roughly 20% of global petroleum consumption and close to 30% of all seaborne crude oil. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar export almost all of their oil through this passage. If it were closed, no alternative pipeline or overland route could come close to replacing its capacity, and global energy prices would spike catastrophically within days.

No other chokepoint in the world concentrates so much economic consequence in so narrow a geographic space. The Strait of Hormuz is only about 33 kilometres wide at its narrowest navigable section, and it is bordered on one side by Iran — a country that has repeatedly threatened to close the waterway in response to international sanctions and regional tensions. That threat alone is sufficient to move global oil markets whenever it is uttered. The strategic importance of Hormuz explains why it has been central to American military planning in the Middle East for decades. The United States Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain largely because of the need to ensure freedom of navigation through this passage. For all the world's investment in renewable energy, the Strait of Hormuz remains, as energy analysts have noted, the single most consequential piece of ocean real estate on the planet.

THE PANAMA CANAL

Panama, linking the Atlantic and Pacific · 82 km long · Expanded 2016 to accommodate Neo-Panamax vessels Around 14,000 vessels pass through the Panama Canal each year, carrying approximately 5% of global seaborne trade — a figure that underrepresents its importance to specific trade routes. It is essential for U.S. East Coast imports from Asia, for LNG exports from the U.S. Gulf Coast, and for grain shipments from the American Midwest to Asian markets. The 2016 expansion allowed much larger container ships and LNG carriers to transit, significantly extending the canal's relevance in a world of growing vessel sizes.

The Panama Canal took a decade to build, cost the lives of thousands of workers, and required the United States to engineer one of the most audacious geopolitical maneuvers of the early 20th century. The result was a waterway that eliminated a journey of over 22,000 kilometres around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America. For almost any cargo moving between the American coasts or between Asia and the U.S. East Coast, the canal is not merely convenient it is the economic foundation of the trade route.Climate change has introduced a new vulnerability. In 2023 and 2024, a severe drought caused by El Niño lowered water levels in the Gatún Lake that feeds the canal's locks, forcing authorities to restrict the number and size of vessels that could transit. The result was a queue of hundreds of ships waiting for weeks; a reminder that even engineered chokepoints remain subject to the constraints of natural systems.

THE STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR

The Strait of Gibraltar handles roughly 100,000 vessel transits annually the gateway between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. It is the entry and exit point for all seaborne trade entering or leaving the Mediterranean, including goods destined for Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East via the Suez Canal, and the Black Sea. Its strategic importance has been recognized since antiquity: the ancient world called the promontories flanking it the Pillars of Hercules, the edge of the known world.

For every container ship from Asia approaching a European Mediterranean port Barcelona, Marseille, Genoa, Piraeus the Strait of Gibraltar is the mandatory doorway. Its role has expanded in the era of mega-ports: Algeciras in Spain, located just north of the strait, has become one of Europe's largest transshipment hubs precisely because of its position at this geographic junction. Cargo from the Americas can be redirected here toward any Mediterranean destination.

THE PORT OF SHANGHAI

Shanghai has been the world's busiest container port for over a decade. Its deep-water Yangshan Terminal, built on reclaimed land 32 kilometres offshore and connected to the mainland by the world's longest sea bridge, operates with a level of automation and throughput that has set global benchmarks. What Shanghai loads or unloads on any given day shapes inventory levels, consumer prices, and production schedules across the entire planet.

The Port of Shanghai is more than a logistical facility; it is a window into China's role as the world's manufacturing hub. Roughly 28% of global container throughput passes through Chinese ports, and Shanghai is the crown of that system. When COVID-19 lockdowns shut parts of Shanghai's port operations in 2022, the ripple effects on global supply chains were immediate and lasting. Electronics, automotive parts, consumer goods, the shortage lists grew long within weeks.

THE BAB-EL-MANDEB STRAIT

Approximately 6–7 million barrels of oil and around 8–10% of global trade pass through the Bab-el-Mandeb daily. It is the southern entrance to the Red Sea and thus the approach to the Suez Canal from the Indian Ocean. Any vessel heading from Asia to Europe, or vice versa, via Suez must transit this passage. Its name in Arabic translates as Gate of Grief — a prescient label given its vulnerability to conflict, piracy, and instability in the surrounding region.

The Houthi attacks of 2023–2024 brought global attention to Bab-el-Mandeb as few events had before. The strait sits adjacent to one of the world's most unstable regions, and its exposure to threats from Yemen's coastline makes it uniquely difficult to secure. The events demonstrated that a relatively small armed group, with limited naval resources, could cause billions of dollars in disruption to global trade simply by threatening passage through a 30-kilometre-wide channel.

THE TURKISH STRAITS

The Turkish Straits the Bosphorus through Istanbul and the Dardanelles to the south are the only maritime passage between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. They carry enormous volumes of Russian and Ukrainian grain, sunflower oil, and energy exports. Their role became geopolitically central following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022: the question of whether Russian warships could transit the Bosphorus was suddenly at the heart of NATO strategy and international maritime law.

Under the 1936 Montreux Convention, Turkey controls the passage of warships through the Turkish Straits a power that has made Ankara one of the most strategically relevant actors in the Black Sea region. For grain specifically, the straits are vital: Ukraine and Russia together supply roughly 30% of the world's wheat exports, and almost all of it must pass through these narrow channels. When the UN-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative collapsed in 2023, food prices in import-dependent countries across Africa and the Middle East spiked almost immediately.

THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

Not every critical trade route is a narrow passage. The Cape of Good Hope route, rounding the southern tip of Africa, serves as the world's fallback when other chokepoints become impassable. It is longer, costlier, and slower than the Suez route adding roughly 7,000 miles to an Asia-Europe voyage but it has no chokepoint of its own and is thus immune to the kind of single-point disruption that can shut a canal or strait.

The Houthi crisis of 2023–2024 revived the Cape route for hundreds of shipping lines. Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in South Africa suddenly found themselves relevant again as refueling and provisioning stops on a route that had seemed to be fading into irrelevance. The episode illustrated a broader truth about global trade geography: the most robust systems have redundant routes, but redundancy always comes at a cost, and the world's economy is calibrated around the assumption that primary routes will remain open.

WHY THESE PLACES DEFINE OUR WORLD

The places described here the Malacca Strait, the Suez and Panama Canals, Hormuz, Gibraltar, Bab-el-Mandeb, the Turkish Straits, the mega-ports of Shanghai and Singapore are not merely logistical waypoints.

They are the geographic foundations of the entire modern global economy. The system of just-in-time manufacturing, of globally dispersed supply chains, of consumer goods traveling from factory floors in Vietnam or Bangladesh to retail shelves in Germany or the United States within weeks, all of it depends on these passages remaining open, deep, and navigable.

Climate change introduces new risks: droughts lower canal water levels; rising seas alter coastal port infrastructure; intensifying storms affect scheduling across entire ocean basins.

Mary Kom Eyes Professional Boxing Comeback after Amateur Career Ends

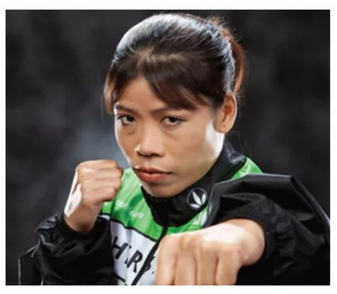
Veteran boxer weighs professional shift after illustrious amateur career hits age

NEW DELHI

Indian boxing legend Mary Kom has revealed she is considering a transition to professional boxing, signalling a potential new chapter after an iconic amateur career spanning over two decades.

The 43-year-old, who became India's first woman boxer to win an Olympic medal with a bronze at the 2012 London Olympics, is no longer eligible to compete in amateur events due to age restrictions. However, she remains determined to stay active in the sport and continue pushing her limits.

Reflecting on her journey, the six-time world champion described her achievements in amateur boxing as unforgettable but acknowledged that a shift may now be necessary. "A new opportunity has surfaced in professional boxing. I am taking time to consider it and working hard to make a comeback," she said.



Widely regarded as one of the greatest amateur boxers in history, Mary Kom's possible move into the professional circuit could mark a significant moment for Indian boxing, inspiring a new generation of athletes.

Beyond her own career, the veteran continues to play a vital role in grassroots development through her academy in Manipur. Despite logistical challenges due to the situation in the region, she remains actively involved in mentoring young talent and overseeing operations.

"My dream is to stay fit for as long as I can, regardless of age," she said, underlining her enduring passion for the sport.

Mary Kom also emphasised the broader importance of sports in nation-building, noting that international success enhances a country's global standing. She praised initiatives like the Khelo India and the Fit India Movement for improving infrastructure and promoting fitness awareness across the country.

Highlighting efforts to include tribal athletes in mainstream sports, she pointed to expanding opportunities under national programmes, particularly in regions like Chhattisgarh.

She also lauded the support from Narendra Modi and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in strengthening India's sporting ecosystem.

As she weighs her next move, Mary Kom's enduring commitment and fighting spirit continue to define her legacy, both inside and outside the ring.

Aryna Sabalenka Downs Gauff to Clinch Miami Title, Completes 'Sunshine Double'

MIAMI GARDENS

World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka defeated Coco Gauff in a gripping three-set final to win the Miami Open women's singles title, completing the prestigious "Sunshine Double" for the season.

Sabalenka triumphed 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 in a high-intensity contest lasting over two hours, showcasing her dominance with powerful groundstrokes and composure in crucial moments. The victory marked her second consecutive Miami Open title and her 24th career singles trophy.

With this win, Sabalenka became the first player since Iga Swiatek in 2022 to achieve the Sunshine Double — winning both Indian Wells and Miami in the same season — underlining her supremacy on the hard-court circuit.

The Belarusian took control early, breaking Gauff in the opening set with aggressive shot-making. Although Gauff, buoyed by strong home support, fought back to claim the second set, she struggled with consistency, committing seven double faults over the course of the match.

The decisive third set turned on a crucial early break by Sabalenka, aided by Gauff's errors. From there, the top seed maintained her intensity and held serve confidently to seal the victory.

Sabalenka also edged ahead in their head-to-head record, now leading 7-6, reflecting the closely contested rivalry between the two stars. Despite the loss, Gauff received enthusiastic support from the home crowd throughout the tournament, drawing energy from the packed stands.

The match saw brief tension when crowd interference disrupted a rally, prompting a warning from the chair umpire and a code violation for Sabalenka. However, the situation was quickly diffused, with the champion later acknowledging the incident and offering an apology.

Speaking after the match, Sabalenka praised Gauff's performance and the crowd's energy, while Gauff expressed disappointment but remained positive about her overall showing during the tournament.

The victory further cements Sabalenka's status as the dominant force in women's tennis this season, as she continues her remarkable run with confidence and consistency on the global stage.

Malinin Bounces Back to Clinch Third Straight World Figure Skating Title

PRAGUE

American figure skating star Ilia Malinin made a remarkable comeback from Olympic disappointment, capturing his third consecutive world championship title with a dazzling performance that reaffirmed his dominance on the ice.

Just weeks after a disastrous free skate cost him a podium finish at the Olympics, Malinin returned with renewed focus and confidence at the World Championships in Prague. Leading after the short program, the 21-year-old delivered a near-flawless routine, landing five high-difficulty quadruple jumps and even adding a celebratory backflip to cap his performance.

Malinin scored an impressive 218.11 points in the free skate, finishing with a total of 329.40, well ahead of Japan's Yuma Kagiyama, who secured silver with 306.67. Fellow Japanese skater Shun Sato took bronze with 288.54.

Known as the "quad god" for his mastery of complex jumps, Malinin chose not to attempt his signature quad axel this time but still dominated the field with consistency and technical brilliance. His performance marked a significant mental turnaround, as he admitted to blocking out expectations and focusing solely on enjoying the moment.

"After the Olympics, I just wanted to move on and skate freely," Malinin said, adding that the support of the crowd played a key role in helping him regain confidence.

The victory makes Malinin the first skater since Nathan Chen to win three consecutive men's world titles, highlighting his place among the sport's elite.

Kagiyama, despite achieving a personal-best free skate score, once again had to settle for silver, continuing a career marked by near-misses at the highest level. He embraced Malinin warmly after the event, reflecting the camaraderie among top competitors.

Elsewhere, France's Adam Siao Him Fa slipped out of medal contention after a fall, while other contenders also struggled in a high-pressure competition.

Malinin's triumph signals a strong resurgence following Olympic setbacks and sets the tone for the next phase of his career. With confidence restored and form peaking, he has firmly re-established himself as the leading force in men's figure skating on the world stage.

Belgium rally from behind to outclass USA in World Cup warm-up clash

Belgium Thrash USA 5-2 in World Cup Warm-Up, Expose Defensive Frailties

ATLANTA

Belgium national football team delivered a dominant second-half performance to defeat the United States men's national soccer team 5-2 in an international friendly, exposing major defensive concerns for the hosts ahead of the upcoming World Cup.

The Americans had taken an early lead through Weston McKennie, who scored his 12th international goal in the 39th minute. It was a promising start for the U.S., which entered the match unbeaten in five games, but the advantage proved short-lived.

Belgium responded immediately, with Zeno Debast equalising just before halftime. The momentum shifted decisively after the break as Amadou Onana put the visitors ahead in the 53rd minute, followed by a penalty conversion from Charles De Ketelaere six minutes later after a handball by U.S. captain Tim Ream.

Substitute Dodi Lukébakio then took centre stage, scoring twice with long-range strikes in the 68th and 82nd minutes to put the result beyond doubt. A late goal from Patrick Agyemang in the 87th minute provided little consolation for the hosts.

The match, played before a crowd of over 66,000 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, highlighted glaring defensive lapses by the U.S., particularly in dealing with Belgium's quick transitions and clinical finishing. Goalkeeper Matt Turner, making his first appearance in months, endured a difficult outing under sustained pressure.

Despite missing key players including Romelu Lukaku and Thibaut Courtois, Belgium extended their unbeaten run to 10 matches and continued their dominance over the U.S., securing a sixth consecutive victory in the fixture.

Ashwin Joins San Francisco Unicorns, Set for MLC 2026 Debut

NEW DELHI

Veteran Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin is set to script history by becoming the first capped Indian international to feature in Major League Cricket after signing with the San Francisco Unicorns for the 2026 season.

The 39-year-old, who retired from international cricket in 2024 and concluded his Indian Premier League career last year, will bring a wealth of experience to the U.S.-based franchise. Ashwin represented India in 287 matches across formats, claiming an impressive 765 wickets, and remains the country's second-highest wicket-taker in Test cricket behind Anil Kumble.

Describing the opportunity as both an honour and a responsibility, Ashwin said he is eager to contribute to the growth of the league while helping his team achieve success. "Taking on the mantle as the first Indian-capped player in Major League Cricket is a responsibility I fully embrace. My focus is to help the franchise win games and push for its first championship," he said.

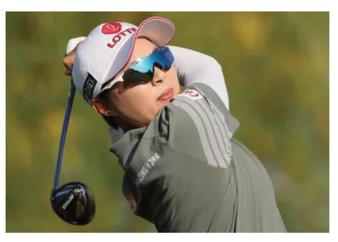
Ashwin's move marks a significant milestone for MLC, which continues to attract global talent as it enters its fourth season. His presence is expected to boost the league's profile, particularly among Indian fans, and further strengthen cricket's footprint in the United States.

The seasoned off-spinner had earlier been slated to feature in Australia's Big Bash League with Sydney Thunder but missed out due to a knee injury. Now fully fit, he is set to return to competitive action in a new environment, bringing his tactical acumen and match-winning abilities to the Unicorns.

Known for his sharp cricketing mind and adaptability in T20 formats, Ashwin's inclusion adds depth to the Unicorns' bowling attack and leadership group. His experience across international and franchise cricket is expected to play a key role in guiding younger players within the squad.

The upcoming MLC season is scheduled to begin on June 18, with franchises aiming to build on the league's growing popularity. Ashwin's participation is likely to draw significant attention, marking a new chapter in his illustrious career while also highlighting the expanding global reach of the sport.

Hyo Joo Kim Sets 54-Hole LPGA Record, Opens Four-Shot Lead



PHOENIX

South Korea's Hyo Joo Kim stormed into the LPGA record books with a sensational third-round performance, setting a new 54-hole scoring record and building a commanding four-shot lead at the Ford Championship.

Kim fired her second 11-under 61 of the week to reach a remarkable 25-under 191 after three rounds, breaking the previous LPGA 54-hole record by one stroke. Her extraordinary consistency and precision, particularly on the greens, left the field trailing and firmly established her as the favourite heading into the final round.

The 30-year-old showcased her brilliance on the back nine, stringing together a dazzling run of birdie-birdie-eagle-birdie to pull away from her closest challenger, Nelly Korda. Kim's putting was especially clinical, requiring just 25 putts in the third round, with seven consecutive one-putt greens highlighting her dominance.

Even moments of misjudgment worked in her favour. On the 16th hole, a wayward approach shot fortuitously rolled down a slope to within seven feet of the pin, allowing her to convert yet another birdie and maintain momentum.

Korda, who began the day with a two-shot lead, delivered a solid bogey-free 67 but was unable to match Kim's relentless scoring pace. Despite her strong round, the American now trails by four shots heading into the final day.

"It was a great round, but she was just unbelievable," Korda admitted, acknowledging Kim's exceptional form.

Kim, the defending champion in Phoenix, is riding a wave of confidence after her recent victory at the Founders Cup, where she also held off Korda. The pair have now played multiple consecutive rounds together, with Kim even describing Korda as one of her favourite competitors.

Mexico, Portugal Play Out Goalless Draw as Azteca Reopens

MEXICO CITY

Mexico national football team and Portugal national football team settled for a 0-0 draw in an international friendly that marked the reopening of the iconic Estadio Azteca following extensive renovations ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The historic venue, which previously hosted World Cup finals in 1970 and 1986, reopened after nearly two years of upgrades and will stage multiple matches during the upcoming global tournament. The match served as a high-profile test event, drawing significant attention despite the lack of goals.

Portugal came closest to breaking the deadlock in the 26th minute when Gonçalo Ramos struck the post, highlighting a match that otherwise lacked clinical finishing from both sides. Mexico, meanwhile, showed glimpses of promise but struggled to convert possession into clear chances.

Mexico coach Javier Aguirre expressed satisfaction with his team's performance, despite acknowledging inconsistencies and the absence of several key players due to injuries. "Overall, the players responded well. There are areas to improve, but it was a positive outing," he said.

Portugal were also without star names, including Cristiano Ronaldo and Rafael Leão, as both teams used the fixture to test squad depth ahead of the World Cup.

The match atmosphere was notable not only for the stadium's reopening but also for events surrounding it. A tragic incident occurred shortly before kickoff when a fan reportedly fell from an upper level of the stadium and died despite medical assistance. Authorities stated that the individual had attempted to climb between sections before losing balance.

Outside the stadium, protest groups gathered to highlight the issue of missing persons in Mexico, drawing attention to ongoing social concerns even as the nation prepares to host the world's biggest football event.

Mexico will next face Belgium in Chicago, while Portugal are set to take on the United States in another preparatory fixture. With the World Cup approaching, both teams will look to sharpen their performances after a match that, while historic in setting, offered limited action on the pitch.

Rejuvenated Buttler Eyes IPL Comeback after T20 World Cup Setback

Break in Alps refreshes Buttler as he targets strong IPL comeback season

NEW DELHI

England's Jos Buttler has expressed renewed enthusiasm ahead of the Indian Premier League, saying a refreshing break in the Alps has helped him reset mentally after a disappointing ICC Men's T20 World Cup campaign.

The wicketkeeper-batsman endured a lean run during the global showpiece, scoring just 87 runs in eight matches as England bowed out in the semi-finals to eventual champions India national cricket team. Opening the innings, Buttler struggled to find rhythm, with his highest score being a modest 26 against Nepal, followed by a string of low scores that raised concerns about his form.

However, the 35-year-old insisted that time away from the game proved crucial. Retreating to the Alps, far removed from cricketing pressures, allowed him to reflect and recharge. "It was great to completely switch off. Now I feel excited and ready for the new season," he said.

Buttler is set to represent the Gujarat Titans in the IPL, beginning their campaign against Punjab Kings in New Chandigarh. Despite recent struggles, he remains one of the most accomplished overseas players in the league, having amassed over 4,000 T20 runs for England since his debut in 2011.

His dip in form has also sparked debate about his future in England's white-ball setup under Harry Brook. Yet Buttler dismissed concerns, asserting that his hunger for runs and passion for the game remain intact. "As long as I have the motivation to train and compete, I'll keep going," he said. The seasoned opener acknowledged the pressures of modern T20 cricket, where aggressive starts are often essential. Reflecting on his approach, he emphasised the importance of staying true to his natural game rather than overthinking performance.

Buttler also addressed the growing tension between franchise leagues and international commitments, echoing sentiments shared by Pat Cummins. While opportunities in leagues continue to expand, he maintained that representing England remains the top priority for players. Looking ahead, Buttler reiterated his belief in the enduring value of Test cricket, calling it the pinnacle of the sport, even as he gears up to rediscover his best form in the IPL.

Samson, Jadeja Face Former Teams as New-Look CSK Meet Parag's RR

GUWAHATI

An emotional subplot will take centre stage when Sanju Samson and Ravindra Jadeja face their former franchise Rajasthan Royals as Chennai Super Kings lock horns with a revamped Royals side led by Riyan Parag here on Monday. For over a decade, Samson was the face of Rajasthan, serving as their batting mainstay, captain, and all-time leading run-scorer. Much like MS Dhoni at CSK, Samson defined an era for the Royals, even guiding them to the 2022 IPL final. However, in a major reshuffle, he now dons CSK colours, while Jadeja makes a return to Rajasthan, adding intrigue to the contest.

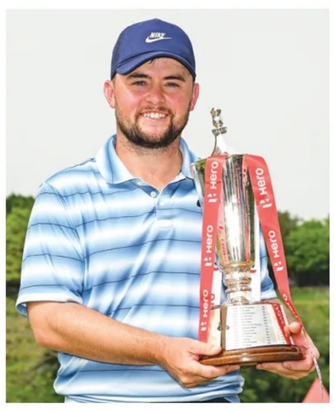
Samson heads into the clash in prime form, having played a pivotal role in India national cricket team's recent T20 World Cup triumph. His string of impactful performances has boosted his confidence, and alongside skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, he is expected to anchor CSK's top order. With Dhoni sidelined due to a calf strain, the leadership responsibilities will rest heavily on this duo.

CSK's transition phase also opens opportunities for emerging talents like Prashant Veer and big-hitting Kartik Sharma, while players such as Dewald Brevis and Shivam Dube add depth to the batting. Their bowling unit, featuring Noor Ahmad, Akeal Hosein, and Matt Henry, offers variety and balance.

Emotional reunions headline CSK-RR clash as new leaders and combinations emerge

For Rajasthan, Samson's departure marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new chapter under Parag, who leads the side at his home ground. The return of Jadeja strengthens their all-round options, though concerns remain about his finishing prowess.

The Royals' batting will revolve around Yashasvi Jaiswal, supported by the explosive Shimron Hetmyer and promising youngster Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. However, their bowling attack, led by Jofra Archer, continues to face questions over consistency despite recent changes. Both teams enter the season after disappointing campaigns last year, with CSK finishing at the bottom and RR just above them. As they seek a fresh start, Monday's clash promises not only high-intensity cricket but also a narrative rich in emotion, transitions, and renewed ambitions.



Fitzpatrick Clinches Indian Open Title

GURUGRAM

England's Alex Fitzpatrick claimed his maiden DP World Tour title with a stunning comeback victory at the Hero Indian Open in Gurugram on Sunday. He finished two shots ahead of Eugenio Chacarra after a brilliant back-nine surge. The win comes just a week after his brother Matt Fitzpatrick secured a PGA Tour title, marking a memorable fortnight for the family. Fitzpatrick ended the tournament at 9-under.

RCB skipper stresses fresh focus as team eyes success in IPL 2026

No Title Defence Mindset, Says Patidar after RCB's Flying Start

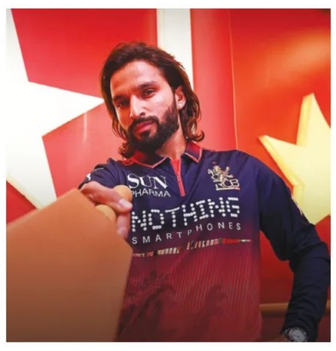
BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar has made it clear that his side is not burdened by the expectations of defending last season's title, insisting their focus is firmly on building a fresh campaign in IPL 2026.

RCB began their season in emphatic fashion, defeating Sunrisers Hyderabad by six wickets in the opener at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Saturday. However, Patidar underlined that the team is not dwelling on past achievements.

"What we did in 2025 has passed. We are not here to defend anything. Our aim is to tick all the boxes this season and that will help us win the trophy," he said after the match.

RCB's dominant win was powered by stellar performances from Virat Kohli, Devdutt Padikkal, and pacer Jacob Duffy. Kohli once again showcased his mastery in run chases, guiding the team with a composed and calculated innings.



Patidar was full of praise for the former captain, calling him a "chase master" and admitting he continues to learn by observing Kohli's approach in training and matches. "The way he reads the situation and executes his shots is incredible. Watching him from the dugout is always special," he said.

He also lauded Duffy for his impactful spell that dismantled SRH's top order, expressing confidence in the Kiwi pacer's ability to deliver consistently in the shortest format.

The match, however, began on a somber note, with players and spectators observing a minute's silence in memory of fans who lost their lives in last year's stampede. Patidar acknowledged the emotional weight of the moment, describing supporters as an integral part of the team's extended family.

Despite the solemn start, the skipper was delighted to return to a packed Chinnaswamy Stadium, crediting the passionate home crowd—often referred to as the "12th man"—for creating an electrifying atmosphere.

With momentum on their side, RCB will now look to carry forward their strong start, focusing on consistency and execution rather than the pressures of defending their crown.

SRH Bowling 'Poor' in IPL Opener, Admits Coach Vettori

BENGALURU

Sunrisers Hyderabad head coach Daniel Vettori did not mince words after his team's defeat in the IPL 2026 opener, terming their bowling effort as one of the poorest displays after they failed to defend a competitive total against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Despite posting 201 for 9, SRH bowlers struggled to contain Virat Kohli and Devdutt Padikkal, who powered RCB to a comfortable victory in just 15.4 overs. Vettori admitted that his side lacked discipline and consistency, allowing the opposition batters too many scoring opportunities.

"We got an early wicket, but after that we were not at our best. We missed our lengths and gave away too many easy runs," Vettori said after the match, acknowledging the exceptional batting by Kohli and Padikkal. The former New Zealand captain pointed out that while SRH had observed effective bowling strategies from RCB, they failed to execute similar plans. He highlighted pacer Jacob Duffy's disciplined approach as a benchmark his bowlers could not match consistently.

Vettori stressed that maintaining tight lines and lengths is crucial, especially on batting-friendly surfaces like Bengaluru, where even a 200-plus total is no longer considered safe. "The game has evolved. Scores that once seemed defendable now require exceptional bowling to protect," he noted.

IOC Gender Tests 'Disrespect Women', Says Semenya

CAPE TOWN

South African Olympic champion Caster Semenya has strongly criticised the decision by the International Olympic Committee to reinstate gender verification tests for the 2028 Los Angeles Games, calling the move "a disrespect for women". Semenya, a two-time Olympic gold medallist in the 800 metres, expressed disappointment that the policy was introduced under the leadership of Kirsty Coventry, the IOC's new president. Speaking in Cape Town, she said the decision could disproportionately affect women, particularly those from Africa and the Global South.

"For you as a woman, why should you be tested to prove you belong?" Semenya asked, arguing that such measures undermine the dignity and identity of female athletes. She described the move as harmful and regressive, especially given the historical controversy surrounding gender testing in sports. The IOC recently announced that eligibility for women's events at the Olympic Games Los Angeles 2028 will be restricted to biological females, determined through a one-time SRY gene screening. The testing could involve saliva, blood samples, or cheek swabs. The policy effectively excludes transgender athletes and many individuals with differences of sex development (DSD) from competing in women's categories.

Gender verification testing had previously been used between 1968 and the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, before being abandoned in 1999 due to scientific criticism and athlete opposition. Semenya noted that the earlier system was scrapped because it failed to deliver fair or accurate outcomes. A long-time figure in the debate over hyperandrogenism, Semenya has fought legal and sporting battles since her breakthrough at the 2009 World Championships. Her case has become emblematic of broader questions around inclusion, fairness, and the definition of eligibility in elite sport.

KARNATAKA'S UNNATHI SHINES AS INDIA SETS NATIONAL RELAY RECORD

BENGALURU

Karnataka sprinter Unnathi Aiyappa delivered a standout performance as India scripted a new national record in the mixed 4x100m relay at the International Invitational Relay and National Open Relay Competitions in Chandigarh.

Representing India B, Unnathi played a pivotal role in a thrilling race where her team edged past India A in a dramatic photo finish. The quartet, comprising Lalu Prasad Bhoi, D Jayaram, Harita Bhadra and Unnathi, clocked 42.30 seconds to break the national record, surpassing the India A team's 42.34 seconds.

The remarkable timing not only secured top honours but also boosted India's world ranking to 19th in the event, significantly strengthening their chances of qualifying for the upcoming World Relay Championships in Botswana. With only the top 24 teams making the cut before the April 5 deadline, the performance could prove decisive.

India also confirmed qualification in the men's 4x400m relay, with the team of Manu TS, Amoj Jacob, Rajesh Ramesh and Dharmveer Choudhary clocking an impressive 3:01.43 seconds to climb to 15th in the global rankings. Meanwhile, the country remains in contention in the women's 4x100m and mixed 4x100m events, currently placed within qualification range.

However, the day had its share of disappointments. The men's 4x100m team was disqualified in the heats following a lane infringement by Karnataka's Manikanta Hoblidhar, who suffered a hamstring injury during the race. In the women's 4x400m relay, the Indian team, including GK Vijayakumari and MR Poovamma, won the final but fell short of the qualifying mark required to secure a World Relays berth.

Karnataka's under-20 athletes also impressed, securing five medals — two silver and three bronze — across relay events. The men's 4x100m quartet finished second, while the mixed 4x100m team added another silver to the tally. Overall, it was a day of high drama and encouraging performances for Indian athletics, with Unnathi's record-breaking run emerging as the highlight and a major boost ahead of crucial international competitions.

Antonelli wins Japan, extends dominant start

SUZUKA

Nineteen-year-old Kimi Antonelli continued his dream start to the Formula One season, clinching his second consecutive victory at the Japanese Grand Prix to strengthen his early championship lead.

Driving for Mercedes, Antonelli delivered a composed and commanding performance at Suzuka, finishing 13.7 seconds ahead of Oscar Piastri of McLaren. Charles Leclerc secured third for Ferrari, while teammate George Russell finished fourth.

With 72 points from three races, Antonelli has become the youngest driver ever to lead the Formula One drivers' standings, underlining his rapid rise in the sport. His latest triumph follows his maiden victory in China earlier this month, where he also became one of the youngest race winners in F1 history.

Despite starting from pole position, Antonelli endured a poor launch and dropped positions early, allowing Piastri to take the lead into the first corner. However, the young Italian showcased remarkable racecraft, steadily climbing back through the field with precision and pace.

A pivotal moment came on lap 22 when a crash involving Oliver Bearman triggered a safety car, bunching up the field and handing Antonelli a strategic advantage. Capitalising on the restart, he seized control and pulled away decisively in the closing stages.

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